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Contents

BIOGRAPHY 201, CINEMA 200, FICTION 198-9, HISTORY 195-6, JOURNALISM 179-80, MUSIC 197, PHILOSOPHY 202, SPORT 203

CONOR CRUISE O'BRIEN
ROGER SCRUTON
HELEN MCNEIL

HUGH BROGAN
STEPHEN FENDER
NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN
AUBERON WAUGH

JULIAN SYMONS
RICHARD ALTICK
JOHN SUTHERLAND
PETER JAY
CRAIG BROWN
PAUL SMITH
ANTHONY HOWARD

CHRISTOPHER HOPE
MARIO VARGAS LLOSA
SALMAN RUSHDIE
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ERICK KORN

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JONATHAN BROWN

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GERALD MANGAN
DAVID COWARD
S. S. PRAWER
FREDERIC RAPHAE
PHILIP OAKES
ALETHEA HAYTER
JONATHAN LEAR
RICHARD SWINBURNE
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GERALD MANGAN
DAVID COWARD
S. S. PRAWER
FREDERIC RAPHAE
PHILIP OAKES
ALETHEA HAYTER
JONATHAN LEAR
RICHARD SWINBURNE
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S. S. PRAWER
FREDERIC RAPHAE
PHILIP OAKES
ALETHEA HAYTER
JONATHAN LEAR
RICHARD SWINBURNE
ZACHARY LEADER
TIMOTHY D'ARCH SMITH

H. R. WOODHUYSEN

Cover picture

Press freedom and the need to please 179-80

Bernard Shaw: *Agitations - Letters to the press 1875-1950* 180

Shelley Fisher Fishkin: *From Fact to Fiction - Journalism and imaginative writing in America* Christopher P. Wilson: *The Labor of Words - Literary professionalism in the progressive era* Yoshinobu Hakutani: *Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser - Life and art in the American 1890s* 181

David W. Levy: *Herbert Cray of "The New Republic" - The life and thought of an American progressive* 182

Robert D. Habich: *Transcendentalism and the "Western Messenger"* 182

George V. Higgins: *Impostors* 183

Claude Rawson (Editor): *The Yearbook of English Studies - Volume 16, 1986 - Literary periodicals special number* 184

The periodicals: *The New Criterion* 184

Lucy Brown: *Victorian News and Newspapers* 185-6

Charles Wilson: *First with the News - The history of W. H. Smith 1792-1972* 186

The writing on the screen 187-8

The tyranny of facts 188

Alastair Hetherington: *News, Newspapers and Television* 189

Neil Postman: *Amusing Ourselves to Death - Public discourse in the age of show business* 189

Fifty years on 189

The Press: international viewpoints 190

Letters on 'Lost Magic Kingdoms', 'Goddess', Robert Graves etc 191

Reminders 192

Commentary

Women Stained Glass Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement (William Morris Gallery) 193

Underground Women: Designs by Women Artists for London Transport (London Transport Museum) 193

Art Nouveau Design from the Silver Studio Collection (Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow) 193

Mackintosh Metalwork (Mackintosh House, Glasgow) 193

Author, Author 193

Arena: *Marguerite Yourcenar* (BBC2) 194

Howard Barker and Thomas Middleton: *Women Beware Women* (Royal Court Theatre) 194

Carlo Goldoni: *Friends and Lovers* (Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow) 194

John Vanbrugh and James Saunders: *A Journey to London* (Orange Tree, Richmond) 194

Jenny Wormald: *Lords and Men in Scotland - Bonds of manrent, 1442-1603* 195-6

William R. Moran: *Nella Melba - A contemporary review* 197

Patricia Howard (Editor): *Benjamin Britten - "The Turn of the Screw"* 197

Nayantra Sahgal: *Plans for Departure* 198

Rikki Ducornet: *Entering Fire* 198

Thomas Berger: *Nowhere* 198

Frederick Pohl: *Pohlsars* 198

Short histories 198

Paula Fox: *A Servant's Tale* 199

Stefan Themerson: *The Mystery of the Sardine* 199

Alan V. Hewatt: *Lady's Time* 199

Don Allen: *Finally Truffaut* 200

Graham Petrie: *Hollywood Destinies - European directors in America, 1922-1931* 200

Steven Bach: *Final Cut* 200

Alan Roke: *Blindfold Games* 201

Robert Liddell: *Elizabeth and Ivy* 201

Ted Honderich (Editor): *Morality and Objectivity - A Tribute to J. L. Mackie* 202

Terence Penelhum: *Butler* 202

Donald Hall: *Fathers Playing Catch with Sons - Essays on sport (mostly baseball)* 203

Prince Ranjitsinhji: *With Stoddard's Team in Australia*

R. C. Robertson-Glasgow: *46 Not Out*

Marquis Williams (Editor): *Double Century - 200 Years of cricket in "The Times"* 203

Among this week's contributors 203

Information, please 203

Sales of books and manuscripts 204

Cover picture: Taken from Lou Stoumen's *Times Square: 45 years of photography* (159pp, with black-and-white illustrations. A portrait, distributed by Phaidon, £25, 0 89381 164 5).

Press freedom and the need to please

Conor Cruise O'Brien

There is one thing the free press and the Soviet press have in common. Both must please.

Any organ of the Soviet press must please, and go on pleasing, a limited number of relevant party officials and through them the party hierarchy generally, the effective owners of the press in question. The Soviet press may also please its general readership, if it can, but only in ways that first please its owners.

Left-wing critics of the free press - which they call, accurately enough, the capitalist press - would mostly be slow to acknowledge the pattern of priorities of pleasing which exists in the Soviet press. But these same critics - who abound, or used to abound, in panels of "experts" advising Unesco - depict, as existing in the capitalist press, a pattern of pleasing which is closely symmetrical to the Soviet pattern. According to this view of the matter, any organ of the capitalist press must please, and go on pleasing, its capitalist owners and capitalist advertisers, and through them the capitalist class in general. The capitalist press may also please its general readership, if it can, but only in ways that first please the capitalists.

There is some truth in that picture; and significantly more than is acknowledged on those occasions in Western societies when the virtues of a free press are ritually extolled. Few if any editors of newspapers in Western societies could afford to ignore altogether the views of their proprietors, on political and other matters. And these views are likely to be those prevalent in the social class to which proprietors belong. The press as a whole reflects those views to a greater extent, and with greater stability, than they are generally reflected in the electoral choices of the public which reads it.

Yet the extent of the symmetry of "communist-subordination" and "capitalist-subordination" in relation to the press stops just about there. Nobody could examine the end-products in question - Soviet newspapers on the one hand and, say, British or American newspapers on the other - without being immediately aware of the enormous contrast in the characters of the two kinds of effort to please. The Soviet press concentrates its effort into pleasing the party hierarchy, the ultimate sole controllers of the entire Soviet press. The capitalist press diversifies its efforts in competition to please a very wide variety of readers.

The Soviet press can afford to bore most of its readers, and indeed cannot afford not to bore most of its readers. Endless reiteration is boring down below, but it is reassuring at the top: the line is the line is the line, and evermore will be so. The capitalist press, on the other hand, cannot afford to bore any significant number of its readers. Each capitalist paper is in the grip of what has been called "the Scheherazade Syndrome". Its readers form a kind of collective Sultan who conveys the unspoken message: "If you bore me, you die."

The reader, under conditions of capitalist competition, is a more formidable figure than any proprietor or advertiser. If a proprietor's newspaper cannot attract or hold readers, then obviously that proprietor will soon be out of business. As for advertisers, they must follow the readers, without question. The idea of advertisers dictating policy is wide of the mark (with occasional minor exceptions). If someone were to produce a Marxist or anarchist newspaper which attracted lots of readers, then people would buy space in that newspaper to sell their goods to all those lovely Marxists and anarchists. Similarly with a Fascist newspaper. Any policy is commercially acceptable, provided it attracts readers. (Again with some exceptions. For example it would be unwise to be associated, through choice of an advertising medium, with a newspaper which gave serious offence to a body of people more numerous and with more purchasing power, than the readers of the newspaper in question.)

The power of the proprietor in the free (or market) press should not, however, be underestimated. What is called "editorial freedom" or "editorial independence" can, in certain circumstances, restrain or fend off a given proprietor's intervention. But not for long; not if

the proprietor is determined, and certainly not if the paper is losing money. If a journalist, for any reason whatever, incurs the serious and sustained displeasure of the proprietor of the newspaper for which he works, that journalist will not be able to go on writing for that newspaper for long, even if he still pleases the readers. The power of the capitalist proprietor, in relation to the newspaper or newspapers he owns, is almost as full, and may therefore be exercised almost as arbitrarily, as is the power of the communist bosses in relation to the press of a communist country. (Only "almost", because the need to please the general readership is a restraining factor on the power of the capitalist proprietor, which has no equivalent in the press of communist countries.)

But there is an enormous difference in the overall situations, because of the concentration of power within communist-ruled societies as contrasted with the diffusion of power in capitalist competitive societies. If, for example, you are fired from the *Irish Times*, for political deviation, your chances of getting a job on the *Vladivostok Vindicator* are practically nil.

On the other hand, if you are fired from a given capitalist newspaper - for failure to please its proprietors - you still have a variety of opportunities within the capitalist market generally. Clearly there is a great deal to be said, with validity, in favour of the free, or capitalist, or market, press. But there is rather less to be said in its favour, with validity, than it is in the habit of saying for itself. So let us consider, first, what may be said, with validity, in favour of this kind of press; and then the limits of that. I shall use the description "the market press" from here on because I think it is more precise than the other terms and lacks the pejorative overtones of "capitalist", as well as the laudatory overtones of "free".

The market press is, by definition, more satisfactory than its ideological rivals. It is more satisfactory because providing satisfaction - the satisfaction of demand - is what it is all about. The ideological press is not about providing satisfaction to the generality of its readers. It is about dispensing guidance, direction, warning, and a certain kind of instruction: instruction to the reader-citizen on what he or she is expected to say or do in order to give satisfaction to his or her rulers, the masters of the press in question.

Because it is required to give satisfaction to its reader-consumers (who are also, by and large, the citizens of the society in question) the market press is necessarily far more democratic than the ideological press, which demands satisfaction for its hierarchical controllers, rather than satisfying the demands of its reader-citizens. Indeed the market press is more democratic than the democratic political system itself. Democratic governments are generally accountable to the citizen-voters not much more often than every few years. But a market newspaper is accountable to its reader-consumers every day of its life, and if it is found consistently less satisfactory than its competitors, its life will soon be at an end.

That the market press is more entertaining than the ideological press, is something that even the most ardent advocate of the latter would not contest. The market press is also

more informative than the ideological press, because market demands elicit a far wider variety of information than centralized control, combined with political censorship, permits. For similar reasons, the market press is more truthful than the ideological press. Competitive conditions make it far less likely that any truth which would interest readers will be suppressed than is the case with a hierarchically controlled and centralized ideological press.

More satisfactory, more democratic, more entertaining, more informative, more truthful . . . So the market press is preferable to the ideological press in virtually every relevant way. Unless, of course, we allow for the possibility that the ideology dispensed by the ideological press is indeed the only correct one. In that case, the ideological press is vastly more instructive than the market one, and the readers of the market press are being systematically deprived of the only valid means of understanding human history and the world they live in. But unless you can actually believe that (which I don't), then the market press wins hands down, any day, against the ideological

to me, dispenses both genuine instruction and pseudo-instruction. And perhaps there is more pseudo-instruction around than is generally admitted. The basic problem is, of course, how to instruct people, without boring or annoying them. The areas in which this is least a threat are those in which instruction and entertainment are intrinsically connected: reviews of books, films, concerts, art exhibitions; also articles on sport. These tend to be the departments where the best writing is found, and the most seriousness, together with the most entertainment. Here many of the readers are really interested, and that makes life more rewarding all round.

On the other hand, those departments which are the most remote from entertainment, and from the direct experience of the reader, are also the most likely to be in the grip of *solemn frivolity*, an intellectual and moral ailment for which there is no known cure. Writers on international affairs, and especially on international terrorism, seem the most liable to succumb to this scourge.

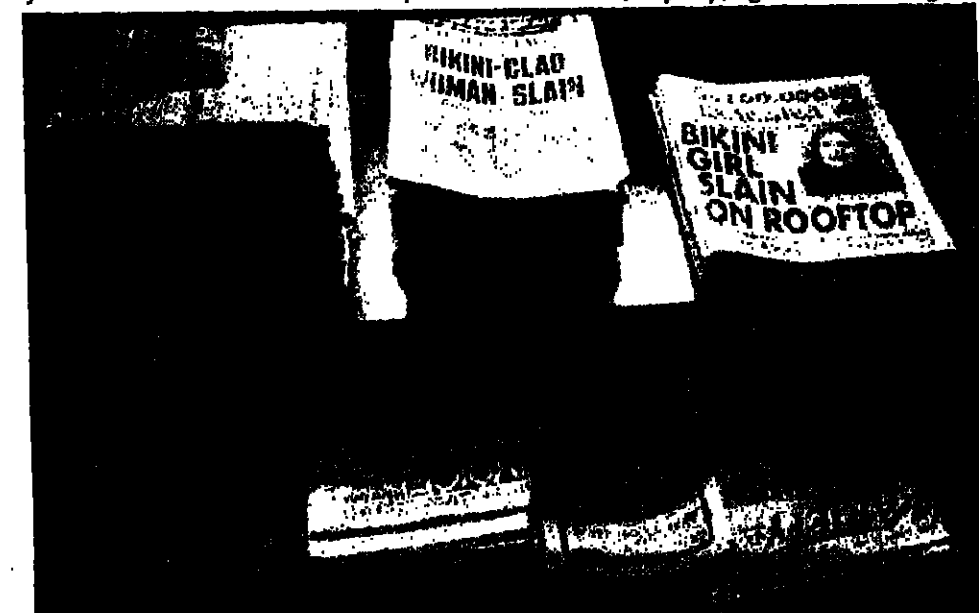
Before going on to speculate about why that should be, and what it may have to tell us about the market press, let me exhibit an example of the kind of thing I have in mind. My example, as it happens, comes from the *Observer*. The *Observer* is, of course, an excellent newspaper, especially in those departments where entertainment and instruction can be happily related. And the most interesting thing about the passage from which I am going to quote is that it could appear, in an otherwise excellent newspaper, in discharge of that newspaper's responsibility to provide its readers with instruction concerning international affairs. The passage occurred in an end-of-year editorial, on December 29 last, entitled "When the world began to come together". As that quasi-millennial title implies, the writer set out to interpret the events of the year with systematic optimism, even though some of these events, on the face of them, may seem hard to interpret in such a way. On the Middle East, the editorial writer had this to say:

In the Middle East, a slow but inexorable progress towards direct talks between Israel and representatives of the Palestinian people seems to be under way. The peace initiative launched by King Hussein has been so often written off that one needs reminding from time to time that it is in fact still alive. Its pace is slow, and setbacks frequent; but there is movement, and that mostly in the right direction.

The two terrorist outrages at Rome and Vienna airports which soured the end of the Christmas break are almost certainly evidence of this. They bear the marks of having been an attempt by disident Palestinian groups outside the PLO to disrupt the peace process and discredit Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader, in two capitals where he has enjoyed some diplomatic support. In the aftermath of such a horror, Israel should be wary of hasty and ill-directed reprisals, which could play into the hands of those who carried out the attacks.

So the two terrorist attacks on Israeli targets at Rome and Vienna were "almost certainly evidence" that the peace process in the Middle East is making satisfactory progress.

The conclusion is remarkable; the method of reasoning through which the conclusion is reached, no less remarkable. In particular, the concept of "evidence" is introduced here with no warrant whatever. The writer attributes a motive to the terrorists without citing evidence for that motive, and then decides that their acts of terror in themselves were "almost certainly evidence" of the motivation attributed to them by him. And as it happens, the editorial interpretation of the background to all this is utterly at variance with the interpretation of the *Observer's* own Middle East specialist, Patrick Seale. In the same issue of the paper. The editorial writer thought that extremists were so discredited by the progress which moderates in the PLO, led by Arafat, were making towards peace, that they, the extremists, lashed out in despair in order to wreck the peace process, thus inadvertently showing that the peace process was working. For Mr Seale, however, it was the moderates, not the extremists, who were "in despair" - Seale's words - at their failure to make progress through negotiation. So the PLO were turning back to terrorism, according to Seale. Thus it appeared that a tendency towards increased terrorism was due to the success of the peace process, or to the failure of the peace process, depending on which bit of the *Observer* you read. Those



Taken from Lou Stoumen's *Times Square*; see cover picture description for publication details.

readers who were looking to the *Observer* for instruction on Middle Eastern affairs must have had their minds well and truly boggled by that issue of December 29.

It is not clear, however, what proportion of readers are looking for instruction on such subjects as that, and what proportion are looking for other things: the pleasures of wishful thinking, for example, or a capacity for appearing well informed. If there is a market for genuine instruction, there is also a market for congenial or pleasing pseudo-instruction: *le confort intellectuel*. It is not always easy to see where one kind ends and the other begins (although sometimes the pseudo-instruction stands out rather clearly, as in the sample above).

Reading news and commentary in various up-market British newspapers, I have the feeling that the commentary is often a sort of antidote to the news. The news is often shocking: the commentary more often sedative. The commentary would claim to put the news "in perspective", and so in a way it does. But the sense of perspective conveyed is often that associated with sedation: the calming sense of having recovered a sense of proportion, which accompanies the operation of a drug. The physical results of war and terrorism often require recourse to anaesthetics. But it seems that even the intellectual contemplation of the threats of war and terrorism cannot be borne for long without some recourse to verbal anaesthetics, and this need also is met by the market press, in the form of what it likes to think of as "instruction".

The reign of wishful thinking, in the press, in relation to international affairs especially, is nothing new. Fifty years ago, at a time when the expansionism of the dictators could probably have been stopped without major war, people in the democracies preferred to believe that that expansionism would somehow stop of itself, without the democracies having to run any kind of risk at all of any kind of war. The free press of the democracies did not throw its collective weight against that preference. The free press, being the market press, agreed with the readers. The right-wing press argued that Hitler, being basically a reasonable man, was bound to get even more reasonable, provided his reasonable demands were met. The left-

wing press wrote "against Fascism and War": a determined show of pacifism would soon bring Hitler to his knees. Intellectually, the right-wing argument was barely tenable: the left-wing argument not tenable at all. But emotionally both were very tenable indeed. Newspaper editorials rationalized the relevant emotions, in language appropriate to their particular readership.

We are all accustomed to hearing it said, and some of us are accustomed to saying, that freedom of expression is the great safeguard of a democracy. But it didn't turn out to be much of a safeguard in the circumstances of fifty years ago. And the same tendencies to wishful thinking – or rather to wishing dressed up as thinking – that were present then are still present in the press today. They are present because there is a demand for them and it is in the nature of the market press to try to satisfy demand, whatever form it takes.

By this I do not mean that freedom of expression is not in any way a safeguard of democracy. I think it is a very important safeguard against internal threats to democracy, such as abuses of power by elected persons. The classical modern demonstration of that was Watergate. And there have been recent and healthy signs of a "Watergate investigating potential" in British public life – although "freedom of expression" in Britain is a much more restricted concept than it is in America. But I don't think that either in Britain or America – or elsewhere – the market press is anything like as serviceable to democracy, in relation to international affairs, as it is in relation to domestic affairs. The reasons for that seem fairly clear. On domestic affairs, the reader – especially the "A" and "B" reader – is likely to be quite well informed, and genuinely anxious to be better informed. Also, capable of distinguishing, and anxious to distinguish, between sense and nonsense, with a definite preference for the former. These are conditions and dispositions making for a reasonably healthy press, so far as domestic affairs are concerned.

In relation to the vast – and partly veiled – range of international affairs, however, the reader cannot hope to be anything like as well informed as he often is in relation to his own country. He is not likely to be prepared to make more than a rather perfunctory effort to

become better informed about world politics. So he will find it quite hard to distinguish sense from nonsense in this domain. He may even have a tendency to prefer the latter, since since nonsense is more readily acceptable than bleak sense. In these conditions there is a certain demand for bogus punditry, and the bogus pundit duly makes his appearance, conjured up by the mysterious power of the market, as was of old the Genie, by Aladdin's Lamp.

The farther away the place is, as a general rule, the more nonsense you can get away with about it. This happens to be exemplified in that veritable treasure-house of editorial bogus punditry, "When the world began to come together". The Genie in charge of that one lit up the Middle East for his readers through the discovery that multiple murder is a harbinger of peace: then he went on to discuss Northern Ireland, where he found things had been also coming together, this time as a result of the Anglo-Irish Agreement of November 15 last.

But the interesting thing was that, although exactly the same category of "evidence" was available in relation to Northern Ireland as that which the editorial writer found convincing in relation to the Middle East, the evidence in question is not introduced in the context of Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland as in the Middle East, terrorists had a busy year, in 1985. In reality the IRA kept on killing people, after the Hillsborough Agreement, as before that Agreement; just as in the Middle East various terrorist organizations kept on killing people, without any ascertainable relevance to the status or alleged status of the peace process. In the Middle East, the commentator interpreted continuing terrorism as evidence of the success of the peace process. So why not see continuing terrorism in Northern Ireland as evidence of the success of the Hillsborough peace process? The evidence is fully as convincing in the second case as in the first, for the sufficient reason that the evidence doesn't exist at all, in either case. The reason for the difference in the nonsense content in the two cases is probably that nonsense is more readily distinguishable, and therefore offered with less abandon, the nearer the topic under discussion is to home.

The level of the acceptability of nonsense in relation to commentary on international affairs seems to be consistent, or nearly so. The

character of the nonsense which the market finds acceptable varies widely, according to place, time and circumstances. In Britain, the mid-1980s as in Britain of the mid-1930s (though in widely different circumstances) is the sedative variety which seems to be in most demand. In other contexts, it has been the alarmist variety: in Britain for example in the mid-1950s ("Nasser equals Hitler"); or in America, at fairly frequent intervals throughout the century. But in both kinds of case, the reader is demanding, and consuming, the intoxicant, whether sedative or stimulating. The sedative kind can make people fail to notice the reality of Hitler. The stimulating kind can get people into a war in Vietnam.

The inadequacy of the market press, in relation to international affairs, is worth bearing in mind, as a significant weakness in our democratic societies. Individual journalists, here and there, do what they can to remedy that inadequacy. (They could perhaps do more if there were less of the "dog doesn't eat dog" principle within the profession. That principle protects the more nonsensical breeds of dog.) But the reasons for the inadequacy are rooted in the market itself and the inadequacy is therefore inherent in the nature of a market press. And the market press, with all its manifold inadequacies and blemishes, is vastly better than any known alternative. Nothing I have said here is intended to give any aid or comfort to Unesco, and its "free and balanced flow of information".

One thing that might help a bit, in spreading an awareness of the dangers inseparable from the advantages of the kind of press we actually have, would be a more widespread use of the expression "market press" instead of "free press". "Market" gives due warning that along with the goods and services go dangers of deception. And "market" replacing "free" already gets rid of one deception: the suggested absence of constraints and servitude, where in fact these abound, in the empire of demand, and of the need to satisfy demand. You are not really free, if you are under unrelenting pressure to please.

I don't remember by now what the Five Freedoms are supposed to be, but I would propose a Sixth Freedom: the Freedom to Displease.

Access to success

Helen McNeill

SHELLEY FISHER FISHKIN
From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and
imaginative writing in America
265pp. Johns Hopkins University Press.
£23.50.

0801825466
CHRISTOPHER P. WILSON
The Labor of Words: Literary professionalism
in the progressive era
299pp. Athens, Georgia: University of
Georgia Press. \$24.
0820307475
YOSHINOBU HAKUTANI
Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore
Dreiser: Life and art in the American 1890s
288pp. Golden Cockerel Press/Associated
University Presses/Cornwall Books. £28.95.
0838631746

These three studies demonstrate forcefully the intimate and continuing connections between reporting and the practice and themes of American fiction. Although Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction* begins with a poet, Walt Whitman, working as a reporter for the *New York Aurora* in the mid-1840s, it could as easily have begun even earlier, with Philip Freneau, Washington Irving, or William Cullen Bryant. Her account ends by reporting an inconclusive debate between Norman Mailer and John Hersey about the morality of invented information in purportedly factual works such as *The Executioner's Song*, but it could as readily have set aside Mailer's habit of personifying movements in himself and considered why so many American writers, from Doctorow to Didion, stress the presence of reportorial "fact" in their fictions, and why bestsellerdom holds such heroic status.

It was in the 1890s, however, that the most telling encounters between the writer and the publishing industry took place. As publishing entered the modern corporate age, it created a new definition of writerly practice. By 1900 there were six times as many American newspapers as in the 1860s, with lower unit costs per paper. The four quality weeklies of 1890, with about 600,000 readers, had expanded by 1910 to twenty weeklies, read by four to five million people. This information explosion entailed a leap in literary production, not just in numbers of hacks and writers of what Frank Munsey called "storiotes", but in individual performance. Jack London wrote fifty books in a nineteen-year career, while at the same time Upton Sinclair ground out over a million words of dime novels, twenty-four books and dozens of articles – and his career was only beginning.

Young American journalists, magazine writers and novelists (often the same men) embraced the new success ethic that was sweeping through American industry. The new age demanded a régime of long, regular hours and efficient procedures, leading to increased production; it accepted a frank drive for monetary success and power; it called for professionalization, "scientific management", and division of labour; it introduced consumer-oriented products, market targeting and (self-)advertising. It also, inevitably, brought about a loss of personal autonomy for the worker or writer.

In the 1890s, fascination with success crossed ideological lines, perhaps because so many writers saw livelihood, profession and first-hand social experience seeming to converge for the first time in American letters. Aspiring writers such as Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair and David Graham Phillips encountered the new business ethos directly when they were young journalists trying to work their way up through the freshly created job hierarchy of the newspaper and magazine industry.

The 1890s saw the institutionalization of the "space" writer or cub, who was paid, like the garment piece-worker, by the inch. The cub might become an "assigned" reporter, competing with rivals for the most striking coverage of the same story, then a specialist or "routine" reporter on crime, society, finance, etc.: The writer whose name sold papers, the prerogative of which is elsewhere no part of his achievement. If Shaw had stuck to music criticism, he would now be read more seriously. But he would also be read less widely, and, as his letters display, was wide and not deep which provided the contemporary appeal.

topher P. Wilson remarks in *The Labor of Words*, in one of his many insights into the psychological economy of newspapers, William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal* was affable enough in person. Yet Willis Abbot (eventually Hearst's editor-in-chief) recalled that in Hearst's absence, "No man, even when protected by a contract, could feel any certainty of his employment or financial security".

If the 1890s paper was a factory, journalists could be described, as they were by Frank Munsey of *Munsey's Magazine*, as "equipment". Other editors and proprietors preferred military analogies, with Joseph Pulitzer of the *New York Tribune* likening the ideal team to West Point cadets. From Pulitzer and Munsey to Rupert Murdoch's "journos" of today is hardly a step at all; only the team spirit has waned. "Journalism is either a school or a cemetery", warned the reporter and progressive novelist David Graham Phillips. To survive spiritually, the writer had to escape to what was perceived as the freedom of the novel, taking his skills and material with him.

Christopher Wilson's *The Labor of Words* grasps the apparent contradiction between corporate control and individual enthusiasm by constant, masterful stress on the economics of the case; where success and a sense of social centrality were available, the aspiring novelist of the 1890s was never far behind. Wilson's convincing study begins with four chapters on the discredited inheritance of "the divine literatus", on newspaper policy and administration, on the new mass magazines, and on the unexpected consequences of the long-awaited International Copyright Law of 1891; only then does he take up his case-studies of Jack London, Upton Sinclair, David Graham Phillips (whose achievement he rehabilitates) and Lincoln Steffens.

Wilson also alerts his readers to the many instances in which either ideology or practice was inherently contradictory, and the contradictions were unresolved. Jack London, for example, applied the harsh lessons of his proletarian background to his writing practice, which he called "brain work". In "How I Became a Socialist" he remembered vividly his pledge to himself: "I shall climb out of the Pit, but not by the muscles of my body shall I climb out." London valued independence, preferring what he called "the bread and butter lash" of freelancing to the wage-slavery of the reporter.

Yet London's work ethic matches perfectly that of the Horatio Alger capitalist: "A strong will can accomplish anything . . . Dig is a wonderful thing." Openly market-minded, London wrote what he called "emotional materialism", energizing his sensibly constructed scenes (which he produced regularly at the rate of a thousand words a day) with atmosphere and bursts of sense impressions, enlivening the whole with melodramatic plots. Although he could not resolve these contradictions, London was alive to their cost. In his semi-autobiographical *Marion Eden*, originally called *Success*, literary composition fatally alienates London's writer hero from himself as he pulls pieces of reality from his mind, only to write them out, put them into the post, and see them turned into commodities.

William Dean Howells, the older Dean of American letters, noted more brusquely that the effort to speak to the masses could also mean to "Barnumize" oneself. When Upton Sinclair seized upon the publicity apparatus of Doubleday, Page to promote his slashing attack on capitalist exploitation in *The Jungle* (1906), he could hardly have predicted that his work would be tidied up into a criticism of sanitation problems. But he might have noticed that his editor had just upped the sales of Thomas Dixon's racist historical romance *The Clansman* (1905) by fanning controversy in precisely the same way.

Sometimes the young 1890s writer began with only a faint awareness of the price of success. In his gold-mine of Theodore Dreiser's dross, Yoshinobu Hakutani has dug out Dreiser's 1898 interview with the elderly nature writer John Burroughs: for the aptly titled magazine *Success*. Burroughs greeted Dreiser tartly: "It is not customary to interview men of my vocation concerning success." For Burroughs, literature was a vocation; for Dreiser, writing was a kind of success. Notably uneasy when interviewing Howells, who had

risen from poverty to combine the old, genteel, high-cultural perspective with a passion for reform, Dreiser was happier with "a very fine picture of success" in Amelia E. Barr, who used "the training influence" of widowhood and poverty to rise through magazine journalism and write thirty-two novels, meanwhile bringing up her fourteen children.

Mrs Barr is the lone female in Dreiser's twenty-eight articles, and not by chance. Both the office-based career structure of the newspaper and the identification of the old, high-cultural Victorian values with the feminine (located by Wilson rather too exclusively in the pages of Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture*) served to keep women writers on the periphery. The new literary style was self-consciously virile and masculine; also, perhaps as a by-product of assigned reporting, it stressed the hidden edges of society: the tramp, the magnate, the murderer, the stockyard, the Klondike.

Dreiser's greatest journalistic thrill came when he penetrated the sanctuaries of money and power by interviewing men like Thomas A. Edison, Marshall Field and Philip D. Armour, the meat-packing baron. Asked by a grovelling Dreiser "to illustrate for our readers what success means", Armour replied, "I am only a plain merchant". Asked whether "the average American boy" could succeed during the depression of the 1890s, Armour replied confidently, "There was never before such a demand for able men". Small wonder that the larger-than-life Armour was both a source for Dreiser's *The Titan* and the villain behind the squalor and exploitation of Sinclair's *The Jungle*.

Professor Hakutani's introduction to *Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser* offers useful information on the provenance and fate of Dreiser's journalism, but the authoritative account of Dreiser as reporter remains Ellen Moers's *Two Dreisers: Man and novelist*. The centrepiece of Shelley Fisher Fishkin's *From Fact to Fiction* is her demonstration of how Dreiser re-used – or simply re-copied – his journalism in his novels. Dreiser's use of the Chester Gillette murder case for *An American Tragedy* is well known, but Fishkin's line-by-line analysis shows the precise re-uses and alterations.

Since Fishkin's study covers a great historical range and concentrates on analyses of individual major writers (Whitman, Twain, Dreiser, Hemingway, Dos Passos) its emphasis is necessarily thematic and textual rather than cultural. Fishkin's study forms an important part of the accumulating case for the tradition of American realism, of a literature of fact and detail. Her arguments are less convincing when she assumes direct, or primary, influence of a typically reportorial commitment. Hemingway's account of the refugees from Adrianapolis in the interchapters of *In Our Time*, is actually weaker journalism than his report for the *Toronto Star*. References are no longer explained, and the sentence structure is eerily repetitious, due, perhaps, to the influence of Gertrude Stein. Fishkin's writers may not have been copying actual contemporary journalistic practice (Whitman's articles, as she points out, were untypical atmospheric for their day). They may have been drawn to reporting more as an ideal of access to the real.

All three books suffer from the absence of reproductions of pages from newspapers and magazines of the period; surely the visual fragmentation and busyness of a *Munsey's Magazine* played a great role in creating the mixture of consumer pleasure and dependence so sought after by advertisers, newspaper editors and television programmers today.

In *Thomas Wolfe Interviewed 1929-1938* (135pp. Louisiana State University Press. £16.95; 0 8071 1229 1) Aldo P. Magi and Richard Walser present a selection of interviews given by Wolfe to American and European newspapers in the years following the publication of his first novel. Ranging in tone from the deferential to the sarcastic, the pieces illustrate Wolfe's abiding concern with such topics as the nature of autobiographical fiction, his Southern background (notably the outraged response of his home town Asheville, North Carolina, to its portrayal in *Look Homeward, Angel*) and his prodigious working methods.

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The precocious socialist

Roger Scruton

BERNARD SHAW
Agitations: Letters to the Press 1875-1950
Edited by Dan H. Laurence and James
Rambeau
375pp. Lorimer Publishing, 16 Tite Street,
London SW3 4HZ. £16.95.
08044 24934

Most letters to the press, in my experience, are too long to be published. Since the writers must know this fact, their aim in putting pen to paper cannot be the simple one of publication. In fact, unpublishable letters to the press constitute a peculiar kind of speech-act, and one which does not fit easily into recognized categories. Certainly, they are not addressed to any person so low in the hierarchy of listeners as the Reading Public. It is arguable, indeed, that unpublishable protests are addressed not to men but to God, and that the letter to the press is the nearest that a fully modern person may come to prayer. It is therefore hardly surprising that the recent declaration by the Editor of *The Times*, that unpublished letters would no longer be automatically answered, elicited a response that was less like the clamour of an indignant readership than the lament of an abandoned congregation.

Things were different when Bernard Shaw first began writing to the press in 1875. Judging by the contents of this volume, editors of the *Star*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, the *Saturday Review*, and even the *Daily Chronicle*, were quite prepared to publish letters of any length – and no doubt saved themselves considerable sums

in doing so. Shaw estimated that he had lost at least four years of creative life in writing "superfluous letters": nevertheless, he intended the result, even when three or four times the length of a modern feature article, to be read and debated, and took evident pleasure in the upset that he caused.

The reader of Shaw's prefaces, and of *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, will know what to expect from a volume of his letters. Although Shaw was capable (as in his contribution to the first volume of *Pabian Essays*) of presenting a reasoned argument in a way that demands an intricate and uncertain answer, his rhetorical gifts, and his strange ability to be most emphatic precisely where he is most mistaken is a source of constant irritation and fatigue. Shaw's reputation does not stand as high as once it did: the wit and charm of the plays are no longer widely mistaken for profundity, and his concealed attitude ceases to amuse. At the same time, he was a titanic force in modern British culture, and the origin of all that is best – as well as much that is mediocre – in the Pabian mentality. The reader of these letters is likely to feel nostalgia for the old *New Statesman*, and for the days when socialism was a half-believable pastime of a charmed upper class. The gaiety and garrulousness of Shaw's commitments contrast refreshingly with the drab resentments that have now usurped their heritage, and Shaw's culture and learning add a dimension to the socialist programme which has long since disappeared.

Nevertheless, except for his brilliant music criticism, Shaw's writings seem now to be de-

void of the common sense that he so zestfully affected, and more like the derring-do of a precocious schoolboy than the mature reflections of a man. It is of some interest to discover, in these letters from an unbelievable seventy-five years of active literary production, that neither the style, nor the thought, nor the feeling, shows much tendency to develop beyond the point which they had already reached when, at the age of eighteen, Shaw wrote to *Public Opinion*, puncturing the illusion that the poor of Dublin might attend Evangelistic services simply for the good of their souls.

Perhaps the most interesting section of this scrupulously edited volume is that containing G. K. Chesterton's reply to a Shavian review, and the ensuing letters by both men. Shaw and Chesterton endeavour to refute each other over a question that remains of the greatest intellectual interest long after the event: the question whether socialism, in the form advocated by Shaw, must inevitably lead to a "Servile State" (as Belloc described it), without true responsibility, true charity, true ambition, or true individual life. Such was Chesterton's claim, and it was put forward in a style which matches the eloquence and robustness of Shaw. Neither correspondent argues at the depth at which so difficult a question could really be decided. But I do not think that it is merely my own inclination to agree with Chesterton that leads to the sense, that beneath a similar gaiety, and a similar love of paradox, there runs through his style a firm statement of common sense that is nowhere to be found in Shaw.

It is in this exchange of letters that one would return, I believe, in estimating Shaw's value as a polemicist. He is unfairly judged by

the letter written after a tour of Leningrad and Moscow, in which he praises the "new dispensation" established by Mr Stalin. He is unfairly judged too by his expostulations against theatrical censorship – in which, like all decent people, he showed himself unable to imagine how far indecency might go. He is perhaps more fairly judged by the letters in which he denounces the ignorant respect for family and motherhood that makes us reluctant to surrender our children to the care of a benign and omniscient state. But it is only when caught up in dialogue with an equal that Shaw's mind fully opens, as he composes for himself the theatrical utterances appropriate to his combative role.

Concerning no subject would Shaw be deterred by the minor accident of total ignorance from penning a definitive opinion. When it came to music, however, he was far from ignorant; and when it came to the music of Wagner he was, by the standards of the time, something of an expert. For those with an interest in the letter about the *Ring*, written to the *Daily Chronicle* in 1898 (the year of *The Peppercorn Wagnerite*), is therefore among the most engaging. It is perhaps hard, looking back on it, to imagine the difficulties experienced by contemporary reviewers in understanding Richard Wagner's denunciation of Siegfried's "elf". But Shaw's bold commitment to a total vision of the *Ring*, combined with a minute attention both to the dramatic detail and to the Wagnerian sources, enables him to write with an authority which is elsewhere no part of his achievement. If Shaw had stuck to music criticism, he would now be read more seriously. But he would also be read less widely, and, as his letters display, was wide and not deep which provided the contemporary appeal.

A positivist's baby

Hugh Brogan

DAVID W. LEVY
Herbert Croly of "The New Republic": The life and thought of an American progressive
335pp. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
£38.60.
0691 04725 1

Herbert Croly, to a superficial view, was not and is not a figure of much interest to those outside the self-conscious intellectual elite in which he moved. He was decent, middle-class, and consumedly shy. He was also the prime political teacher of his generation (born in 1869, he died in 1930), the author of a classical work of American political thought (*The Promise of American Life*) and the founder, and first editor, of the *New Republic*, for long America's most distinguished liberal periodical (it has recently changed owners and ideology). To English men and women of a certain age Croly is best approached, perhaps, by way of Kingsley Martin, the greatest editor of the *New Statesman*, the journal upon which the *New Republic* was modelled. The comparison is much in Croly's favour. He lacked Martin's light and easy way with words, and his mind moved more slowly. His judgment of men and events could occasionally be quite as faulty. But he was never silly like Martin, never unscrupulous, or intellectually dishonest, or capricious. His magazine was never so entertaining as the old *New Statesman*, but it was weightier; this, though the two journals shared many contributors: Keynes, Russell, Harold Laski. It is impossible to read about Croly without coming to like and respect him. Writing about him seems to have had the same effect on David Levy.

If Croly was a teacher to his own time, he may be an example and inspiration to ours, an age in which such unquestionable integrity is far to seek. Yet he was in many ways an exceedingly odd exemplar. For one thing he was an out-and-out positivist. Professor Levy has had to establish this fact by careful reasoning in the face of other writers' tendency to pool-pooch or deny it, but he does so incontestably. Croly was one of the very few Americans to receive infant baptism in the positivist church (in the jargon, he was presented to the service of the Goddess of Humanity). After this initiation his father, David Croly, brought him up on the teachings of Auguste Comte as strictly as John Stuart Mill had been brought up on those of Jeremy Bentham. All counter-influences were staunchly resisted (one of Levy's chapters is entitled "Harvard College versus David Croly") and, because Herbert Croly loved his father, Auguste Comte was to the end of his life the chief influence on his thought. In his

The eastern view

Stephen Fender

ROBERT D. HABICH
Transcendentalism and the "Western Messenger"
208pp. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
£20.95.
08396 3204 1

It is a theme for Henry James. In 1835 a group of highly educated, well-connected young clergymen from Boston, with names like Peabody, Clarke, Perkins and Elliot (grandfather of the poet), got together in the Ohio Valley and founded a monthly journal to carry the liberating notions of Massachusetts Unitarianism to the sectarian Baptists and Presbyterians of Louisville, Cincinnati and the outlying western settlements.

On the face of it, not a very promising venture, but from its beginnings the *Western Messenger* was a missionary conduit, not just of religious doctrine, but of all the latest ideas from more enlightened points East. In its five years and sixty issues of life, the *Messenger* also published essays on poetry, philosophy, politics, translations of Goethe and Schiller, original poems by Emerson, Joyce Kilmer and even Keats, and increasingly – since it kept strenuously afloat on the surface of intellectual

last years, when everything he believed in seemed to have been permanently defeated, he even turned back to something very like the Religion of Humanity in the yet more bizarre form of the doctrines of Gurdjieff: here, he thought, was something that would help with the imperative task of moral education. It is a credit to Comte, as well as to both Crolys, that the positivist influence was almost entirely beneficial; but it remains distinctly odd, or at least unexpected, that the ideas which swept America during the brief Progressive era, those expressed in Herbert Croly's *Promise*, should have owed so much to a thinker of whom most Americans had never heard and whom almost all intellectuals would have dismissed as shallow, irrelevant and, worst of all, old-fashioned.

Yet it was not really unnatural. The great thinkers of the early nineteenth century had struggled, each in his way, to provide an evolutionary framework which should make the multifarious changes then proceeding intelligible. None had more than a partial success, but it happened that the topics and categories which Comte put forward were especially apt to American conditions just before the First World War. The old Jeffersonian society, a minimally governed republic of Protestant farmers, was slipping into the irrecoverable past; industrialism, urbanism and pluralism were rushing forward; Americans hardly knew where to turn or what to make of it all. They were finding their way by trial and error when *The Promise of American Life* appeared in 1910. Comte had taught Croly to welcome change and to recognize facts such as the irreversible growth of bureaucratic organization in business and government. Now Croly passed the teaching on, insisting that such odd shibboleths as the sacrosanct Constitution, the notion of "checks and balances" and the Jeffersonian maxim that "the government is best which governs least" must be abandoned, or at least thoroughly modified, in the name of a new nationalism. Prosperity and justice were not to be found in eighteenth-century abstractions, but in a willing identification of the individual with the larger organisms of his day – trusts, labour unions and, above all, the nation. America must also recognize its new character as a Great Power and develop an active foreign policy accordingly. Some of these attitudes look dubious today, certainly not liberal – it did not at this stage occur to Croly that Americans might fail to share his self-denying devotion to the good of others. (Only in the last footnote of the book, and then in another man's phrase, does Levy glance at Croly's slight but perceptible affinity to fascism.) But his ideas squared excellently with his comparatively innocent times. Croly explained Theodore Roosevelt to himself and to the American people, and thus became famous.

fashion – contributions by and assessments of the New England transcendentalists. It was less interested in specifically western issues, and Ephraim Peabody, one of the paper's four founders, was suspicious of western literature which dealt merely in the local colour of "wilderness or prairie... log cabins or scalping knives". "They may write of these matters," he added, "and still... be servile imitators of the hack-writers of the London press." Since most of what passed, then, and more recently, for "western" fiction has been the product of excitable eastern authors with a deeper knowledge of popular romance forms than that of the various western settlers themselves, Peabody's discrimination was acute, if hardly encouraging to local talent.

So what killed the *Messenger*? – or more to the point (since a five-year run was no minor achievement in its time and place) why will almost no one have heard of it before encountering Robert Habich's cleanly written, scholarly and judicious book on the subject? Possibly because the journal was founded on so many contradictions. Its founders, like many of their less idealistic contemporaries, seem to have been uncertain what they meant by the West. Was it a discrete geographical area, with its own economy, social structures, needs and concerns to be both addressed and described by a journalistic venture? Or was it defined

Among those drawn to Croly by his book were a handsome, rich and public-spirited young couple, Willard and Dorothy Straight: Sidney and Beatrice Webb rewritten by Scott Fitzgerald. The *New Republic* was their idea, and it was they (or rather, Dorothy, a Whitney heiress) who had to pay for it, since it never earned its keep; but in every other respect the journal was Croly's. As already indicated, he was a great editor. He knew how to respond to changes in the weather, so to speak: the emphasis of the magazine until 1920 or thereabouts was political, but in the 1920s it focused more and more on the arts and the life of the mind; and he was a remarkable talent-spotter. The young man on whom he relied most during the *New Republic*'s first few years was Walter Lippmann; during the 1920s it was Edmund Wilson, of whom Croly predicted in 1926 that "before long he will take his place as the soundest and most trustworthy critic in this country". The accuracy and precision of this prophecy are themselves almost sufficient to suggest why in Croly's time the *New Republic* was a touchstone for all liberal and lively minds in America.

But it suffered fearful ups and downs. It was an ardent propaganda sheet for Woodrow Wilson from its inception until the publication of the Versailles treaty. This event damaged the morale of American liberals far more than the facts warranted. The treaty was an unsatisfactory document – what treaty is not? – but its outstanding drawback from the *New Republic*'s angle was that it did not endorse the paper's view of what the war had been about and what sort of peace was desirable. It was the fact that the treaty was a compromise that was unforgivable. With characteristic American moralism Croly and his associates had gradually come to see the First World War as a struggle between darkness and light (in this they much resembled Wilson himself); they had also deluded themselves that the great work of organizing for victory would change American society, and hence the world, in the direction which they favoured. Bureaucracy inspired by liberalism would be triumphant; and liberalism's spokesmen would be themselves. The treaty compelled them to recognize how extremely small was their influence – as small, says Levy (borrowing an image from Randolph Bourne) as that of a child riding a mad elephant.

It is always a tragic moment when we realize our impotence. For a few years the middle-class, Eastern, Ivy-League intellectuals had seemed to have the future in their hands. Now they were to be disillusioned, for their influence had rested, much more than they had understood, on their alliance with very different groups – nationalists, businessmen, Southern whites – and when the alliance was broken, as it was by the war, they were reduced

up urgent issues like slavery and abolition, the enfranchisement of the working man, and (no less important, for serious Christians of that time and this) the status of miracles; the *Messenger* retreated, with almost hectic urgency, to the middle ground. Slavery it condemned, but not slave owners. It then declared the subject closed. What the labouring classes needed, wrote Channing, is not social or political advancement, but "Elevation of Soul". Up to point, indeed, no doubt, but the rich and privileged slept soundly on in their satin slippers, and Channing returned to Cambridge, "never to spend" (as Mr Habich puts it) "several months in seclusion and meditation in his mother's home".

Meanwhile other papers, like *The Dial*, espoused transcendentalism without blushing or boomed the future of the West, like James Hall's *Western Monthly*; or, like the *Boston Quarterly* under Orestes Brownson, developed a Unitarian orientation into a highly articulate Christian Socialism. Only one of these lived longer than the *Messenger*, but they all did more. As Mr Habich writes, "The *Messenger*'s nonsectarian independence... was in itself illness." He thinks this liberalism, "the paper's glory, I'm not sure. You can't go on for ever saying about everything that you disagree with the message but support the right to say it. After a while, it just isn't possible."

Or else they took non-sectarianism too far, at least for the vigour of journalism. "This *Messenger*'s editor, William Henry Channing (nephew of the Dr) when subscribers began to bolt. Maybe that was the trouble. An increasingly adversarial society began to throw

to nullity. They did their best according to the lights, quarrelling among themselves to while; but they might as well have stuck to the gardens. The war had stirred up a whirlwind of reaction and bigotry which could not be mastered.

The liberals had relied on Woodrow Wilson (one of themselves, after all) to bring home a treaty that would vindicate their stand. Instead he seemed to have gone over to the enemy. So as Walter Lippmann later put it, they gave hand to the Battalion of Death themselves. Keynes's onslaught on the treaty was scathing in the *New Republic* and did untold damage. The beneficiaries were Warren G. Harding and the Ku Klux Klan.

After such a catastrophe it is hardly surprising that Croly came near to despair of public life. Levy's last chapter makes melancholy reading. Everything Croly had supported had gone down to defeat (he did not live to see dawn return with the election of Franklin Roosevelt). He could not even win a reversion for Sacco and Vanzetti. Yet the 1920s were perhaps his finest years. Not only did he keep the *New Republic* going, in spite of the death of Willard Straight (Dorothy continued to lead the paper) and declining circulation, he converted to the deepest theme of his position: insisting on the need for a moral reform, as well as scientific political reform. Positivism believed that "private life is in the normal conception subordinate to the public"; as a positivist baby he had been pledged to the useful service of the human community. Now he had become a Christian, but he had done so as one seeking new strength for the battle. He never gave up the quest for human improvement. In this which makes him so inspiring a figure in these dismal days of President Pangloss and Mrs Gradgrind. "The way to render a capitalist society immune from revolutionary socialism is to treat revolutionary agitation not as the removable cause of social insecurity, but as the natural effect of social irresponsibility, helplessness and impiety." Not an unfamiliar thought, but well worth saying at the time of the Red Scare, and today. Croly showed us what dignity one may wait for better times, and that meanwhile there is always work to be done.

Professor Levy has written a somewhat austere life of an austere figure, but by leaving out the small chatter which serves to make commonplace biographies readable (not that it is easy to imagine chat about Croly, a man who had no small-talk) he brings out with all the greater force the importance of his subject's public career. John Stuart Mill is occasionally overpraised as "the Saint of Rationalism". Auguste Comte was emphatic that positivism, too, needed its saints. Here is a worthy record of one of them.

Making the newsiest news

Nicholas von Hoffman

GEORGE V. HIGGINS
Impostors
368pp. Deutsch. £9.95.
0233 97901 8

She is a freelance writer and drives a BMW; he is the chief executive officer of a communications corporation and drives a Porsche 911. The brand name of every possession owned by the hero and heroine, and every other one-dimensional figure, in George V. Higgins's new novel about American corporate journalism is passed on to the reader. The characters describe each other by their trade marks: "But he does like the Armani suits, and the Italian loafers, and he's got the 40R Chris Craft and the condo in St Thomas, so Jack in a Corvette, at 55 or 6, well, it didn't surprise me."

But, even in a story set in the world's greatest consumer society, labels cannot delineate character or make the stillborn come alive. In *The Friends of Eddie Coyle*, Higgins showed that he has a fine ear for the speech of the lower-class Boston Irish, and of the lawyers and bailbondsmen in the lesser courts of the Massachusetts First Jurisdiction. Unhappily, there are no characters from that colourful *demi-monde* in *Impostors*, where the world is white-collar and the story revolves around reporters falling to expose the shabby tactics of local real-estate developers. These businessmen are protected from close journalistic scrutiny, because they have shielded two newspaper reporters from the law after one was caught having sex with an under-age girl and the other had murdered his homosexual lover.

Such things do occasionally happen in American journalism; but they are not exclusive to journalism. What might have made *Impostors* interesting would have been to have built on journalism as it exists and is practised in America. The actualities are quite different from what most of us, our heads still full of

Scoop and *The Front Page*, think.

In the past, reporters and editors routinely accepted gifts from businessmen and politicians in return for putting things in the paper, or for keeping them out. In the bad old days of Chicago journalism no railroad crossing fatality was ever reported, the railroad companies having greased many palms to suppress such news. Every Christmas, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fé railroad used to give an enormous party to which every local journalist was invited. And for days after, tales were told of inebriated city editors staggering into the ice sculptures and the champagne fountains.

Christmas was when the underpaid ladies and gentlemen of the Fourth Estate were able to make up some of what was lacking in their pay cheques. Cases of whisky, television sets, boxes of steaks would arrive in such volume that one year at the *Chicago Daily News*, management posted a notice asking the staff to "keep their loot out of the aisles". All of that happy nonsense is gone. Where once management regarded the bribes received by staff as a means of controlling pay-roll costs, now the acceptance of gratuities is ground for immediate dismissal.

People suffering the personality disorders which betoken, if not genius, at least a genuine originality and a fresh view, are seldom tolerated and never knowingly hired. Those who get past the filters of the employment procedure to win jobs in the modern newsroom are tireless careerists, team players, men and women who have learnt how to operate in large organizations. The contemporary practitioners of this once eccentric calling are now insecure, bureaucratized, and adept at sacrificing individual flair to corporate policy.

And corporate policy does not countenance the staff backing favourites. Modern media managers, almost always executives in an absentee ownership corporation, avoid the dangers inherent in using the enterprise for personal favours. Idiosyncratic favouritism is a throw-back to the days when newspapers were

dominated by their owner-proprietors. Rupert Murdoch's use of the *New York Post* to further Mayor Ed Koch's fortunes has given Mr Murdoch a slightly anachronistic image in an industry where this kind of thing has all but died out. In the next few years he will probably have to give up such personalized touches. More than a billion dollars in debt for his last broadcasting acquisition, he must surely conform to the conventions of modern American journalism.

Pressure from the institutions from which he has borrowed money may not drive Murdoch to emulate the *New York Times*'s swaying, somnambulant pace but he will have to create the kind of bland environment in which large corporations want their advertisements to appear. These advertisers don't seem to care what the journalism says, as long as it is said in a seamlessly unobtrusive manner. American television journalism has perfected the technique of presenting the worst crimes of the twentieth century in the mildest, most uninteresting way. Regardless of how nauseatingly repulsive the topic, how worryingly threatening, television journalism can present the corruption of public officials, revelations about the sexual abuse of children or pits of freshly killed political victims, so that everyone, regardless of creed, will remain tranquilly open to the message from McDonald's announcing the development of yet another Mac Food.

But the perfection of the universal monochromatic voice of American journalism cannot be credited entirely to the pressures of advertising. Television, as a government-licensed medium, learnt early in its institutional history that it pays to avoid controversy. Causing trouble could not increase revenues, but could involve a television station in expensively protracted licence-renewal proceedings.

In the era of the fighting newspaper editor, the lunatic owner-despot – personified by names like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst – mobs of newspaper readers were known to congregate in front of editorial offices, where they threw stones, heated vats of

tar and prepared bags of feathers. With the advent of television and the newspaper chain, as most cities came to receive what was effectively one newspaper, printed journalism began to transform itself into the same sort of non-partisan, civilly neutral journalism as government-regulated broadcasting. In the past, when Republicans only read Republican papers and Democrats read Democratic ones, it was culturally and politically impossible for a journalistic enterprise to hope to appeal to all newspaper readers in a community; today this is exactly what communication companies try to do. They judge their success, not *vis à vis* the competition, which seldom exists for a daily newspaper, but in what is called "market penetration" – the percentage of homes or individuals in the circulation area who watch the station or take the newspaper.

Market-penetration journalism became possible as news shifted away from a subjectively political narration of events and evolved into a standard commodity. To itself, and to its public, the industry insisted that news could be objectively presented, that a newspaper account was not a version of what may have happened.

In fact, the "objective" news story isn't a narration, an account of events, at all. It contains no fact independently found and attested to by the reporter or his news organization. It is a stringing-together of assertions, pro and contra, of the actors concerned with the event. Thus the journalist who finds the facts, organizes and presents them is as obsolete in today's industry as the Linotype machine or the typewriter. But a vast public has been convinced that objective, commodity news is the newsiest news. Wherever one goes in America, one hears and reads its depersonalized voice. Its narrow emotional range, its implicit values and prejudices have supplanted regionalism, diversity and the older polyphonies of debate and disagreement and individualism.

Perhaps next time Higgins writes a novel on journalists, he will bear these themes in mind.

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Putting the literary clock back

Auberon Waugh

CLAUDERAWSON (Editor)
The Yearbook of English Studies:
Literary periodicals special number.
Volume 16, 1985.
366pp. Modern Humanities Research
Association. Available from Honorary
Treasurer, MHRA, King's College, Strand,
London WC2R 2LS. Paperback, £11.50.
0947623027

This sixteenth volume of the *Yearbook of English Studies* is its ninth Special Number, this time devoted to literary periodicals. The year 1987, we are told, will be devoted to the gloomy subject of British poetry since 1945, but the volume for 1988 will go back to Pope, Swift and their circle, to celebrate the tercentenary of Pope's birth.

Sceptical as one may be about the inspiration of these Special Numbers – which, at any rate in the small world of literary periodicals, generally seem calculated to fit editorial convenience rather than satisfying any particular demand from the readers – this last move seems to me to be in the right direction. If, as I believe, very little original material of any value is being written nowadays, then it follows that the study and enjoyment of English literature will concentrate to an ever greater degree on the glories of the past. The volume under review, with about seventy per cent of its matter devoted to pre-twentieth-century literature, would certainly seem to support my contention that we are going to have to look further afield than the last fifty years for our anniversary issues and our celebratory special numbers. To make my point, I have chosen, out of the 125 reviews and articles on offer, to concentrate on those about literary periodicals in the twentieth century. I may be wrong – and the message seems unlikely to reach many university literature departments for at least another fifty years – but I have the impression that the intelligent reading public is fed to its teeth with the Modern Movement and everything it has produced.

In his contribution to this *Yearbook*, Jeremy Treglown, Editor of the *TLS*, lists four principal institutions supporting what must, for want of a better word, be described as the literary establishment, although he prefers to talk of it in terms of the history of twentieth-century literature: the publishing houses; the university literature departments; the patronage bodies, whether Arts Council or independent prize committees; and the literary magazines. He does not address himself to my point, that, with the exception of the publishing houses, all these props of the literary establishment have, to a greater or lesser extent, served as an obstacle rather than as an assistance to the enjoyment of English literature for the past fifty years. Nor does he contemplate for a moment my own theory that critical fashions, whether emanating from the universities or from literary magazines, have had a baneful effect on the development of English letters throughout this period.

Instead he addresses himself to Pound's great complaint about the *TLS* – too rude and tedious to quote here – and establishes quite satisfactorily that the *TLS* was, among other things, in the vanguard of the Modern Movement throughout the 1920s and even earlier. True, it omitted to notice *Ulysses* and *The Rainbow*, but it was taking Pound seriously in 1918. At this stage he does not ask himself the essential question: *Was this wise?* He is injured that the *Critical Heritage* volume on Pound does not include enough *TLS* material from such writers as Arthur Clutton-Brock, who, along with Richard Aldington, T. S. Eliot, Edmund Blunden, John Middleton Murry and Virginia Woolf, was effectively a staff writer on the *TLS* in these years.

But he takes some comfort from the fact that an unenthusiastic review of *Women in Love* by Blunden was, in his opinion, correct. And in general he makes a good case for arguing that the *TLS* played its part in the headier days of the Modern Movement – although it is not a case I should care to make now, if I were Editor. But the real justification for the *TLS* is touched upon without being developed. In 1921, when Joyce completed *Ulysses* and Eliot

The Waste Land, the *TLS* gave much attention to the fourth volume of Proust and to Aldous Huxley's *Crome Yellow*. It spotted them as important. Treglown points out that it also reviewed, although briefly, P. G. Wodehouse's *Indiscretions of Archie*, and noticed among some 2,398 other books, the following titles: *The Blue Dress*, *The Blue Hat*, *The Blue Ribbon*, *The Blue Room*, *The Blue Vase*, *A Great Coup*, *A Great Mistake*, *The Great Way*, *The Great Gay Road*.

All these Blues and Greats have now been forgotten, as it happens, although I am reluctant to believe that none is worth revisiting, even if only the last one. It might well have emerged, if critical fashions had taken a different turn, that the early 1920s would be remembered not for *Ulysses* or *The Waste Land* or Proust's *A la Recherche*, but for the Great Blue Period of English literature. I do not suppose that critical fashion is less capricious than that. The important thing is that the *TLS* does its best to back the field. It is for fashionable fly-by-night magazines to decide whether to prefer *Ulysses* to *The Blue Vase*, and some may follow the fashion. The only serious or reputable function of literary journalism is to offer the choice, in as stimulating and readable form as possible. Mr Treglown has missed the point.

But not so thoroughly as Bernard Bergonzi, of the University of Warwick, who contributes a thoughtful reassessment of a long-forgotten periodical called *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, which flourished as a monthly for slightly less than a year between March 1925 and February 1926 before disappearing as a quarterly with a circulation of under 1,000 in July 1927. Its editors and contributors drifted off, for the most part, into the Communist Party of Great Britain, where they spent the rest of their time denouncing each other. Bergonzi makes a case for supposing that it had some influence on the (he means an) "English Literary culture of the 1920s, when modernism was being consolidated". It once very nearly

published James Joyce's "Anna Livia", an early version of part of *Finnegans Wake*, but the printers refused to print it. So the magazine did not, actually, publish any Joyce. But it nearly did.

Donald Davie records a valiant effort by Manchester to break away from the London and Cambridge strait-jacket with the *Poetry Nation Review*. It struggled, inevitably, in the existing literary climate, amid accusations of antisemitism etc – the inevitable charge against anyone in the literary world who does not toe the New York line. But *PNR*'s mistake has been to suppose that a political attitude is either necessary or desirable in a literary periodical. Intelligent Englishmen, I would maintain, are as much bored by politics as they are by the Modern Movement. In this respect, the Tory politics of C. H. Sisson are even more boring than the left-wing politics of Edgell Rickword and Douglas Gargan. Ralph Cohen contributes an almost unreadable account of the *New Literary History*, a journal addressed to pedagogues and academics in a forlorn attempt to politicize their pupils in "one of the first journals to present sophisticated Marxist discussion of literature".

The *New York Review of Books*, described by Stephen Fender, did not keep up the pretence of being a literary magazine for long. Someone might stir himself, one of these days, to write a treatise on the influence of the *NYR* towards securing Ronald Reagan's victory in the Presidential elections. The combination of literary modernism with political radicalism represented in "that much enlarged constituency of the American universities" which, according to Mr Fender, "has taken the place of the literate and leisured class for which the British and American quarterlies of the nineteenth century were intended", may well, it seems to me, have helped to reinforce the opposite convictions of the Silent Majority.

Any editor of a literary periodical is bound to be haunted by Professor Fender's theory that the campus market has taken the place of

that "literate and leisured class" which once have bought our wares. I think and hope he is wrong, and that there is a growing market of retired people, of schoolteachers and librarians who would like to be kept acquainted with whatever might amuse them in the world of English letters. Nobody can deny that there is a campus market in the United States, and Fender points out, "the United States is an intensely political country". It is also a considerably richer country than Britain. Students have more money to spend on their predilections. Britain is neither political nor rich. I may be wrong in my perception of a great revolution from politics among the intelligent British young, but I am confident in my perception of their inability to pay for a literary periodical, whether politically committed or not. It is either of my perceptions is right, it reflects unfavourably on Karl Miller's preoccupations at the *London Review of Books*, for which he claims a readership of "around" 15,000. I imagine that the significance of that word "around" is that the sale of *LRB* was something under 5,000 in September 1984 – the date on his article. Perhaps I am alone in seeing Professor Miller as representing the reduction to absurdity of everything that has been happening in the English Lit industry: "These lines are being written in the Tuscan hills, which go up and down like circulations outside my window", he explains. "The other night I saw my first fiery dancing through the woods, like some midsummer night's dream." I suppose that it is within the ordinary experience of the intelligent, literate English public to see circulations going up and down outside their windows, even if they have never seen a Tuscan hill; similarly, I suppose they frequently see midsummer night's dream dancing through the woods, even if they have never seen a firefly.

I hope and believe there is still a future for English letters – and for a literary periodical – away from such absurdities and away from the current fixation with Pound, Joyce, Eliot and Proust. I may be wrong, but time will tell.

The periodicals: *The New Criterion*

Julian Symons

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.
\$27 per annum.

A vigorous statement of intentions by the editor, Hilton Kramer, introduced *The New Criterion* in September 1982. Or rather, a statement of what the magazine would oppose or avoid: Leftist pieties, which had "casually insinuated themselves into both the creation and the criticism of literature" in a way unknown since the 1930s; the "hopelessly ignorant, deliberately obscurantist, commercially compromised, or politically motivated" approach of most journals and newspapers. What then would *The New Criterion* be for? That it would "distinguish high art from popular culture" seemed the nearest thing to a clear answer, although "the defense of high art in a democratic society has never been a simple or an easy task".

The magazine is monthly, edited from New York. Mr Kramer is an art critic, and there is an emphasis on visual art unusual in a literary periodical. Poems appear in most issues, but no prose fiction. The issue for January 1986 has the editor writing about Picasso in the context of the opening of the Musée Picasso in Paris, and an unfriendly assessment by another contributor of "the new art world" as represented by an exhibition of *rompe-poell* photographs. The previous issue included a piece about a Renoir retrospective in Boston. In these two numbers literature is represented by an excellent view of Milan Kundera's headstrong talent and its occasional approach to kitsch, a long review-article about Dorothy Wordsworth, pieces about Italo Calvino and Jean Rhys; The writers have space to analyse, quote, offer judgment and develop reasons for making it. The characteristic tone of the principal contributors is assured, assertive, logical – Jed Perl on current art, Mimi Kramer on theatre, Bruce Bawer and Joseph Epstein on literature avoid obscurities and abstractions, are clear-minded, sharp and sometimes witty. Epstein is good on "the English Department novel" (John Barth a

prime example) which "no one outside an English department would for a moment consider reading". Mimi Kramer says that Paul Fussell's passion for indiscriminate quotation gives the impression "not that [he] has read widely, but that he has an unusually dogged research assistant".

British literature is given a good deal of attention: an article in the first issue on Barbara Pym, and later a tribute to Empson, a detailed taking to pieces of Doris Lessing, an attempt to revive the poetic reputation of Roy Campbell, examination of Fenton, Motion, Larkin, a fine piece about Andrew Young. The review of Larkin (September 1984) deals with his *Required Writing* and is refreshingly frank, unlike most of the English reviews, about the foolish cost-trailing done deliberately to annoy, although it concludes that "Larkin's silliness is essential to his excellence". The poems, of course, are another matter. Three memorial essays are promised for future numbers.

The New Criterion, like Eliot's old one, is intelligently written and edited, and articulates a coherent point of view. It must be said, however, that the promise to "distinguish high art from popular culture" seems to have been mislaid, or at least to have become a minor consideration compared to the running battle fought by the editor against Stalinism present and the ghost of Stalinism past, which clank about constantly in their chains to give Mr Kramer bad nights. An example is an exhortation of Lillian Hellman (October 1984); no doubt a necessary corrective to the eulogies pronounced after her death, although there seems a disagreeable gloating note about the remark that her reputation "was well on its way to becoming a shambles" when she died. Kramer concludes triumphantly that Hellman's gift of half her estate to a fund bearing the name of Daughters Hammitt shows her lasting Stalinist sympathies, since Hammitt was "yet another unrepentant Stalinist". The statement about Hammitt is very dubious (asked by his brother whether he remained a Communist he said "I'm a Marxist"), and the fund is devoted to the advancement of civil rights, civil

liberties and economic equality, causes with which it seems hard to quarrel. The heat generated here contrasts curiously with Kramer's tender and touching article about his friend Josephine Herbst (September 1984), who really was an unrepentant Stalinist.

But perhaps each man loves the thing he hates, and certainly Kramer returns often to the politico-literary past, in an exchange on "Stalinism Then and Now" and a brilliant article about a recent *Partisan Review* anthology which manages to omit mention of Philip Rahv, the magazine's co-founder and guiding light in the great days of the 1930s and 40s. Great days? The nostalgic admiration is Kramer's. "What other magazine of the time could equal this dazzling roster?" he asks, naming the contributors to an issue in 1937.

It sometimes seems that the editor and his principal contributors see for their ideal a modern version of the old *Partisan Review*, at least on its critical side, a periodical not exactly of the Right, but one that keeps both eyes open for possible Anarchist or Stalinist implications. Bruce Bawer's relentless examination of Doris Lessing's work in relation to her politics (September 1985) is a case in point. If such an end is not achieved, it is because, although there are no duds among the contributors they don't quite make up the dazzling PR roster that Hilton Kramer wistfully remembers. Yet every issue contains unhooked, well-informed articles, free of academic gobbledygook, and making no bows to what is merely fashionable. As a critical periodical *The New Criterion* is probably more consistently worth reading than any other monthly magazine in English.

"In your issue today", Arthur Conan Doyle wrote to *The Times* in 1913, "Mr Ronald McNeill describes the project of a *Cassell* novel as a 'crazy' one." Some years earlier he had written that it was "incredible" that a "South African cricket team is about to visit this country". *Letters to the Press*, edited by John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green (Secker and Warburg, £15.00, 436 pp., 1980), spans Doyle's working life, from 1879–1900.

Shaping an image of the world

Richard Altick

LUCY BROWN
Victorian News and Newspapers
303pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £32.50.
0198226241

Victorian England, in all its untidy complexity, can be visited from central London at the mere cost of a pound or so's fare on the Northern Line. In the British Library's Newspaper Library, just across the road from Colindale Station, uncounted tons of newspaper files preserve, with a detail and an immediacy unmatched in any other archive, the sixty-four years of Victorian history as the public lived and witnessed it.

Most of the readers who today page through those elephantine bound volumes of London and provincial papers are concerned with their contents: they are searching the long columns of type for very specific information from a particular time. Only a few, like Lucy Brown, are interested in the history of the containers. But the aggregate product of the institution of journalism is a monumental social artefact in itself. The newspaper was second only to the railways in its impact on Victorian society. The railways revolutionized the way the English lived; the newspaper revolutionized the way they saw the world they lived in. As the total readership of the daily press soared, the Victorian generations became the first major portion of English society to have "reality" laid before them, day after day, by a well-organized form of profit-seeking business. Or rather, several different versions of reality, because as daily papers proliferated they cut the cloth of their news coverage to suit the tastes and capacities of the audience each served.

The title of this book is a regrettable mislabelling. It does not reveal what the introduction merely hints at and only the jacket copy makes plain, that *Victorian News and Newspapers* not only is confined to the second half of the period (roughly 1870–1900) but even within those chronological boundaries omits large parts of the story – some would say the most important parts. Like other historians working in the field most brilliantly illuminated by the late Stephen Koss, Brown concentrates on the later Victorian press in its political role. Not that she sees it in complete isolation from other developments that marked English journalism in its transition from the earlier age of radical Sunday papers and *The Times*'s domination of the daily market, to the twentieth-century one of Beaverbrook and Northcliffe and a mass readership which bought papers mainly for the football and racing results. Much of her contextual material bears on the general history of the press: the long overdue abolition of the stamp and paper "taxes on knowledge" in 1855–61 and the technological breakthroughs which cheapened daily papers to the point where they could be afforded by millions instead of tens of thousands; the greater use of the telegraph once its rates were reduced; the invention of the interview, and of syndicates and press agencies providing identical material to scores of papers; the new booming prosperity of evening papers; the increased prominence of foreign and war correspondence; and such aspects of "the new journalism" – Matthew Arnold used the term, and he did not mean it as praise – as prose simplified and enlivened for the office-boy clientele and news presented in snippets instead of lengthy articles.

With its extension of the franchise, the Second Reform Act of 1867 created a large new market for journalism among a class that previously had neither bought daily papers nor been much interested in partisan politics. Newspaper publishing became more attractive as a form of investment. Entrepreneurs increasingly realized that a well-capitalized, well-managed paper could turn a healthy profit as well as serve as a mouthpiece for the Conservative or Liberal cause. Newspapersmen as a class were better educated, some, indeed, being university graduates. Their improved social status smoothed the way to more intimate contact with politicians and as a consequence not only facilitated their access to political news but made their papers more susceptible to manipulation. As a staple of news, the traditional, speech-by-speech reporting of Parliamentary debate – a soporific to the new

readership – gave way to inside stories describing the daily goings-on in Westminster and Whitehall.

Brown does justice to these innovations, and offers an innovation of her own. Instead of analysing the effect of the press on public opinion, the customary direction of historical studies of the press, she examines the effect of late Victorian partisan politics on the operations of the press. Some of her most instructive pages deal with such matters as the bearing of lucrative government advertising on a newspaper's political stance and the extent to which news was controlled by the public relations policies of government agencies and the military. She shows, in addition, how the old, blatant political suborning of the press was replaced by quieter subsidies from a party's treasury or by even quieter cultivation of influential editors and writers without money changing hands.

But there was much more to what Brown calls "the advance of the newspaper to a central position in public life". Politically oriented historians, like sociologists and the new hybrid breed of specialists in "communication history", when they write about the history of journalism, tend to see the press as an institution whose main, sometimes only, significance is as a political mechanism – the Fourth Estate. They attribute to it more power than it may, in fact, have possessed. The relations between politicians and editors can be satisfactorily described, as in this book, but the results are harder to prove. It is true that even so late in the century, some people, idealists and party strategists alike, clung to their grandfathers' faith in the wholesome omnipotence of the printed word in a liberal, qualifiedly democratic society. If the press could not move mountains or spread universal enlightenment, its news reports and editorial pontifications could at least turn out governments.

The distortion that is probably inevitable in specialized accounts like Brown's can be corrected by looking afresh at Trollope's parliamentary novels, which are generally accepted as an authentic picture of national political life in the late 1860s and the 1870s. His office-holding or politically ambitious characters, from the prime minister to leading members of both houses and heads of departments, obviously were men who would have been constantly in the news. Yet in Trollope's pages they have little contact with the press, and the only memorable working journalist Trollope introduces is the odious Quintus Slide, editor of that rag of high principles and low scandal, *The People's Banner*. And if political journalists were not really as ubiquitous in the corridors of power as historians of the press make them seem to have been, there is also a certain fallacy in the notion that the average reader of the daily papers, especially in the century's last decades, was a political animal and that a paper's circulation area was equivalent to an electoral constituency. Although Brown and her fellow historians fully record the momentous shift in the centre of gravity, in terms of daily circulation, from the threepenny or twopenny papers written for St James's clubland to the halfpenny ones aimed at the working-class clientele of Beamesday's pubs, they don't headline the fact that, apart from occasional sensational episodes such as the Dilke-Crawford scandal, the cheap press gave comparatively little play to politics. The turn-of-the-century press lords and their editors, keenly aware that the advertising revenues on which their papers now largely depended were directly contingent on circulation and that circulation in turn depended on giving readers what they wanted, knew very well what they wanted, and it was not the latest news from the Houses of Parliament.

Even in Palmerston's day, before advertising became the crucial factor in the economics of daily journalism, one suspects that some papers' lavish reporting of speeches, both at St Stephen's and on the hustings at Manchester or Edinburgh, was due as much to the easy availability of this category of news and the seductive convenience of shorthand as to overwhelming popular demand. And even supposing that middle-class readers of the moment had the equivalent of the papers of the moment, it was the general news that engaged them most. The bulk of it was domestic, though similar dispatches that came over the wires from other countries had the

same appeal: disasters, accidents, crimes, riots, court hearings, public occasions such as building dedications or state visits, the fashionable events that from the beginning of the century to the end were the speciality of the *Morning Post*.

No Victorian editor or the proprietor behind him long survived by foisting on their audience classes of news in which readers were uninterested. On the contrary, it was those papers which made extraordinary efforts to satisfy the public appetite that, in the short run at least, made the money. Even at a time when the total readership of the London press was small, there was keen competition for the lion's share. One of Dickens's proud exploits as an energetic young reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* in 1835 was to match the *Times* man, relay by relay, as they raced their coaches through muddy roads to bring back the result of an election at Exeter. Dickens won, and his paper had four-and-a-half columns to *The Times*'s three, "an instance of expedition", said a provincial paper, "unparalleled in the history of journalism". A record of the lengths to which rival papers went to give saturation coverage to sensational crimes shed as much light on the Victorian mind as monographs on the political press. One of the several great murder trials at mid-century, that of Dr Palmer, the "Rugeley poisoner", in 1836, filled page after page in all the London papers, one of which, the twopenny *Illustrated Times*, doubled its circulation to the staggering figure, for the time, of 400,000. Thirty-seven years later, the so-called Ardamont Mystery trial in Edinburgh attracted over 100 journalists, who filed a total of 1,860,000 words to their papers. The staid *Scotsman* alone devoted twenty columns a day to the proceedings. No political event ever touched off such massive outpourings of printer's ink.

How was it shaped from day to day, this ongoing version of the world of people, places and events beyond the individual reader's personal experience that Victorian journalists prepared for him to read at the breakfast-table or homeward bound on a commuters' train? We know a good deal about the way that edited tissue-paper sheets of reporters' copy were transformed into printed folios by express train. Brown provides the customary budget of information on the increasing productivity of the printing machine and the circulation of individual papers, including a scattering of demographic data – the economic and social composition of their readership, a more elusive consideration. But except in her brief and in any case circumscribed chapter on "Handling the News" she tells little of the way the pages of copy came into being in the first place, and of how the raw events were processed for consumption. In the communication of news through any medium, from Red Indians' smoke signals to electronics, there is an inescapable element of selection. The routine mechanics of news-gathering and presentation that contributed to the discrepancy in Victorian times are not yet fully documented.

We can be reasonably sure that many events which in one way or another, directly or remotely, affected the Victorians' lives were not reported at all. To make news, events had to occur prominently, dramatically, or within certain fixed social contexts, as in politics, the Church, the law, the learned professions. Occasionally the conception of news was enlarged to include the results of what we today call investigative reporting, three famous instances of which were Henry Mayhew's classic series on life and labour among the London poor for the *Morning Chronicle*, William Howard Russell's Crimean dispatches to *The Times* which disclosed a scandalous tale of bureaucratic corruption and mismanagement at home and military ineptitude in the field, and W. T. Stead's exposé of the international traffic in child prostitutes for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a circulation-building stunt that backfired on Stead in the form of a prison term. But ordinarily newspapers were indifferent to the circumstances surrounding events. Carefully assembled "backgrounders" were not part of the daily repertoire. Nor did the ideologies that determined a paper's editorial position have much discernible effect on the selection and coverage of the day's happenings except in so far as the proprietors' political and financial

interests and connections led to a related story's being slanted or suppressed.

The long battle in the century's first decades to establish freedom of the press as an inalienable civil right had been won, and while government agencies tried from time to time to discourage potentially embarrassing coverage, journalism was exempt from overt official interference. Strict libel laws exercised an indirect form of censorship, but, as if in compensation, newspapermen then were not hamstrung by any such stringent curbs on the reporting of criminal cases *sub judice* as present-day law imposes. Legal restrictions and the prevailing moral climate apart, no explicit rules of the game governed the selection and treatment of news; as it evolved from a grubby trade into a profession fit for gentlemen, journalism did not develop a formal code of ethics. But even in its least trammelled state it must have had a few rudimentary standards of conduct which curbed anarchy with a measure of scruple. Outside the old-established Sunday press with its radical tradition there was a tacit understanding that privacy was to be observed and publicity not thrust upon the unwilling, at least in respectable society. Sin and scandal there had a better chance of evading the news columns than when they occurred among "the million". The licence with which papers copied one another, the general effect of piracy being mitigated only by an occasional credit line, suggests that whatever other areas an informal understanding applied to, it was not printed columns viewed as a form of literary property.

We know less than we would like about the precise routine by which news that qualified for print was filtered from the sum of the day's occurrences. We can surmise that the modern intelligence network by which a newspaper is alerted to various classes of events existed in rudimentary form in Fleet Street, though it was not until the last Victorian years that the telephone rendered it faster and more efficient. A busy London reporter must have spent a fair amount of his paper's money on cab fares in the course of a day. Some had their private beans, keeping in touch with such dependable news sources as the police, (with whom they had a wary relationship which was at once friendly and adversarial), magistrates' and other courts, hospitals, the fire brigade. But how was space allotted? A reporter who was assigned a certain number of words when he went out to cover, say, a scientific meeting could expect to see his copy ruthlessly cut if late-breaking stories of a multiple homicide in Brixton, a conflagration in Birmingham, and a shipwreck off the Cornish coast competed for the day's fixed number of columns, but priorities a century ago were not always or necessarily today's, and evidences of a Victorian editor's news decisions as they appear in the files at Colindale are among the many indications available to us of

Modern Newspaper Practice

F. W. Hodgson

A one-volume introduction to all aspects of newspaper journalism and the journalist's world. The role of the editor, day-to-day practice, reader participation, the running and practice of the newspaper, and new technology and its effect on newspaper practice are all examined in detail. *Modern Newspaper Practice* is invaluable for students or trainee journalists on NCTJ and degree courses, and journalists on in-house training programmes. Lecturers may obtain inspection copies by writing to:

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the climate of the public mind for which he acted as a surrogate.

The writers of the general news stories in any edition were as nameless as the "two gentlemen not very neat about the cuffs and buttons" in *Black House* who attended the inquests on Nemo's body and Krook's less tangible remains at the Sol's Arms. The stereotyped notation we have of these newsmen, some salaried (but not extravagantly so), some penny-a-line freelancers scraping an edge-of-poverty livelihood from sniffing out and reporting occurrences the others overlooked, is of a raffish company who after the last morning edition had been put to bed adjourned to Fleet Street taverns for heavy bouts of drinking, smoking and talking. Many had served apprenticeships on provincial papers; some were on the way back there. But all working journalists, from the eminences who revealed what the makers and shakers of contemporary society were thinking and doing to the seedy scribblers who haunted Bow Street police court, contributed to the image of the world that newspaper readers acquired from day to day.

Forming a detailed, reliable idea of the atmosphere and practices of the Victorian news press is not easy, despite the enormous size of the surviving product. The memoirs and biographies of editors, leader writers and political, foreign and battlefield correspondents are invaluable to the historian of Victorian England's domestic politics and foreign relations but much less to the student of the everyday craft of newsgathering. Few common reporters, the dogsbodies of the trade, left any reminiscences. And the novels of the period, otherwise so rich in social detail, are curiously unrewarding on this subject. From Regency

days onward, to be sure, fiction records the presence of newspapers in upper and middle-class homes, coffee rooms and taverns. It is common to see men reading the papers – and an occasional woman too: Dickens's Miss Abbey Potterson placidly surveys the news as she keeps order at the bar of her dockland pub,

and Sloppy, also in *Our Mutual Friend*, "does the police in different voices" when he reads the crime reports to an enraptured Betty Higden. But journalism itself turns up in Victorian fiction almost entirely in a single context, the many electioneering sequences that enliven narratives from the riotous campaign and

editorial skirmishes at Eatonswill onward. Despite Dickens's early initiation in the trade and his continuing participation in it as an actual newspaper editor (briefly, of the *Daily News*) and later as editor of two successful weekly papers, in his novels he visited Fleet Street only for its journalistic associations but as a familiar locale in David Copperfield's youth. The only entry under "newsmen" in an occupational directory of Dickens characters refers to the philoprogenitive Adolphus Tetterby in "The Haunted House". Thackeray worked for *The Times* and other papers, but in his novels the journalists, again, are not newsgatherers. Trollope's Tom Towers, who exposed the flagrant abuse of a charitable trust at Elinor Hospital, was editor in effect, if not in title, of the all-knowing, all-powerful *Jupiter*.

Conventional historians may deprecate such hard-to-document aspects of Victorian journalism as mere atmospherics, a colorful and often picturesque byway on the periphery of the subject. But they are no farther removed from the centre than records of life in vicarages are separable from the formal history of Victorian religion. Journalism is not, nor was it in Victorian times, solely a matter of structure and physical and economic operation, centring in the business office (the Victorians' counting-house) and the press room. What went on in the world of the reporters and the disorderly "editorial chambers" to which they brought the news and packaged it for print has its own place in the historical account. It is unfortunate that so promising a title as *Victorian News and Newspapers* was not saved for a book as well researched as Lucy Brown's but with much wider scope.



Reproduced from John Westmacott's Newspapers (64pp. British Library, £4.95, 07123 0055 4).

Cleaning up

John Sutherland

CHARLES WILSON

First with the News: The history of W. H. Smith 1792-1972
510pp. Cope. £12.95.
0224 021567

It is reasonable for someone English to feel a little chauvinistic thrill, when flying from Heathrow to New York, at the superiority of the reading matter offered by the British airport. At the London end the variety of books and the variety and quality of newspapers are clearly better. Any review of W. H. Smith's contribution to English culture must acknowledge the firm as a force for good ever since "Old Morality" (ie, W. H. Smith II) opened his first book-stall at Buxton Station, in 1848. Britain's enviable balance between a strong metropolitan (or "national") press and a strong provincial press is largely the product of Smith's delivery network. The 15,000 miles of railway laid by 1880 may have linked the country physically, but it was Smith's who set up the communication channels which (unlike the railways) have survived and evolved with the information revolution of the twentieth century.

All this deserves the cheers which Charles Wilson leads in his history of the firm. There is, however, another side to the newspaper trade which Smith's dominate as retailers, wholesalers and distributors. Wilson likes to picture his subject less as a firm than an extended family with a "peculiarly organic quality". But on the disowned edge of the Smith's empire there remain conditions of anachronistically Victorian exploitation. The retail newspaper trade retains, I think, the only systematic use of child labour, for the household delivery of newspapers. And the frantic individuals who live by hawking evening papers at the mouths of Underground stations are direct descendants of the peddlers of a hundred years ago, their unearthly, incomprehensible yells about final editions the last of the cries of old London. From what I can observe, paper-vending in England is a hard life. In America, morning deliveries are made by unionized, uniformed men in trucks, and street-corner pitches are occupied by efficient automatons which yawn out a paper in return for a quarter.

Wilson's book (which I presume was commissioned by W. H. Smith) has the strengths

and weaknesses of the house history. A major strength is that he has had access to the notoriously impenetrable (and apparently tantalizingly incomplete) Smith archive. He has clearly also benefited from the confidential testimony of members of the firm. The main weakness is a loyalty to his subject which at times verges on the hagiographic. Wilson writes about the Smiths in the style of Samuel Smiles. There is the same equation made between personal virtue, diligence and eventual public reward in the form of wealth and empire. The superior goodness of W. H. Smith's is a refrain throughout the book. It was common enough for Victorian businessmen to put their godliness alongside their commercial ambition. As Daniel Macmillan put it when founding his Victorian business empire: "We booksellers, if we are faithful to our task, all are aiding our great Taskmaster to reduce the world into order, and beauty and harmony... at the same time, it is our duty to manage our affairs wisely, keep our minds easy and not trade beyond our means."

But Christian enthusiasm of this sort is odd in a modern economic historian like Wilson, especially when he pursues his vision of Smith's godly capitalism to a rhapsodic *O altitudo*: Far from resenting the wealth and status of the partners, the employees accepted it as a natural and well deserved consequence of the characteristic common to everyone, the proprietors and those co-partners they recruited to the service of the business – total devotion to the welfare of the business and those who worked in it, which was seen as overriding even the individual interests of the partners and their families; a concept of an Ark of the Covenant: the prime duty of the "brotherhood" was its safe keeping.

This would be more convincing if Wilson actually dealt with the sweetly unresistant workforces. But nowhere in his account – except in the accompanying photographs – do we get any idea of what it was like to work for Smith's below boardroom level. And the expressions on the faces of Smith's (more properly Viscount Hambleden's) labouring army strike me as at best servile and in some cases downright bold.

Wilson's ideological sympathy with Smith's owners takes the form of sneaking asides against "Marxist, post-Marxist and semi-Marxist historians", who are "critical of capitalist contributions to social progress" and who suggest there might be an alternative press which (while being first with the official news) Smith's has effectively suppressed. He scoffs at

those shallow pates who think that a newspaper, or its distributors, can survive "in piety in a social vacuum regardless of their cost yet still representative of a liberal-progressive consensus where changes of ethos are only in a presumed progressive direction". Wilson's logic is simple: papers cost money to make, therefore they must subscribe to and support a capitalist ideology. This is shareholders' history.

Wilson reserves the tricky topic of Smith's busybodying censoriousness for his meditative final chapters. Historically, the firm has enjoyed what amounts to a monopoly of supply at transport termini, but frequently (given the multiplicity of sales involved at retail level) denies the traveller what he wants. Wilson defends Smith's timidity in matters of stock as a necessary evil. Because it is efficient, the firm has become large and rich and a tempting legal target. To protect itself, and its efficiency, Smith's has to be cautious. The price of getting the *Daily Telegraph* at breakfast-time in John O'Grady's is not having something less safe on sale at King's Cross.

Ever since W.H.S. II took over as the missionary of the North Western line, the firm's activities have been controlled by morality clauses in their lease agreements with stations. And the nature of the British libel laws makes them quite unfairly accountable for the contents of the material they handle. Some painful and, on one occasion (when the notoriously litigious Bodkin Adams was prejudged by *Newsweek*), expensive lessons have made Smith's understandably cautious. But what is striking in a firm so involved with journalism is that it has never done anything which the fiercest observer could call crusading.

The *Private Eye* case is not mentioned by Wilson; but it is to the point: Did Smith's ban the satirical magazine all those years because as "W. H. Smug(?)" they wanted to punish its rudeness to their person, or because they were properly prudent? Is there no substance in the complaint that Smith's discriminated against politically radical publications (while being quite willing to stock *Mafly*)?

Wholly unreflexive though it is, Wilson's book is packed with information. He offers incidental but complete accounts of the growth of road and rail systems in Britain, innovations in printing technology, the enlargement of the English reading public and the evolution of the press. His account of Smith's circulating library is masterful and gives welcome hard

figures on this elusive subject. Wilson threads an expert way through the multitudinous separate leasing agreements which made up Smith's Victorian railway bookstall empire. The chronicle has a kernel of human interest in the father-son friction between the first two W. H. Smiths. Father was a dynamo, monomaniacal in his dedication to making a fortune out of farthings. His son was never married to trade the same obsessive way. His first inclination was to go into the Church. Frustrated in this, he consolidated the business only to go into politics as soon as he decently could, leaving management to gifted outsiders.

Wilson convincingly identifies the "battle of wills" between the Smiths in the 1840s as the first of the three turning-points in the evolution of the firm. The next was the move from railway bookstalls to high-street shops in 1850, a change of character masterminded by Harry St John Hornby (who emerges as a commercial hero almost greater than Smith the founder). The third turning-point was "going public" in 1949. One might detect a fourth in Smith's vanguard role in the current conversion of London's mainline stations into American-style shopping malls.

Successful negotiation of these turning points largely explains how Smith's have contrived to grow from small newsgather to national institution. But overall, Wilson's study suggests that their long-lastingness owes much to a canny sense of when not to turn. Smith's have always known their limitations. They did not, for instance, expand into Scotland and Ireland, tempting as it must have been. In their methods, they have been a sensibly un-innovative firm: In the past ten years, their incursion into the LP and book-club markets has been massive, but late in the day. Others pioneered; they clean up. Their inexorable success is a tribute to the virtue of leaping seldom, and always on to proven solid ground.

There is, one concludes, something appropriate in the English anonymity (as it were) of Smith's name. If we dislike the firm, its unimaginative, safe stock, its pompous decency, its cosy dominance of the railways and high streets of England – it is ultimately not English selves we dislike; the selves that want to read the *Telegraph* or an Agatha Christie on the journey to the half-paid-for house in the suburbs. And, as with the monkeys on the Rock or the ravens in the Tower, it is probably in our best interest that W. H. Smith and his should sit at Buxton for ever more.

The writing on the screen

Peter Jay

In the beginning was the word. In the end will be nothing but the picture. Woe, woe for culture, art, education, literacy and rationality, to say nothing of the employment of printers, publishers, writers and journalists! Who has not heard this lament a thousand times?

The demise of the printed word has been often that one may be led to wonder why so implausible a proposition should none the less have seemed plausible to so many quite serious people so frequently. The answer may be found, at least partly, to lie in the confounding of several quite different questions, some of them essentially industrial and technological, some of them social and cultural and some purely aesthetic.

An impetus to the popular, or at least widespread, apprehension of the decline and fall of the printed word may be nothing more profound than the perennial climate of crisis and often picturesque byway on the periphery of the subject. But they are no farther removed from the centre than records of life in vicarages are separable from the formal history of Victorian religion. Journalism is not, nor was it in Victorian times, solely a matter of structure and physical and economic operation, centring in the business office (the Victorians' counting-house) and the press room. What went on in the world of the reporters and the disorderly "editorial chambers" to which they brought the news and packaged it for print has its own place in the historical account. It is unfortunate that so promising a title as *Victorian News and Newspapers* was not saved for a book as well researched as Lucy Brown's but with much wider scope.

If we are to get behind these careless impressions, we need – as always – facts and distinctions. First, some facts (according to the careful scholars of the National Foundation for Education Research): Caxton's printing press was invented in 1474; in 1500 less than one person in twenty in England and Wales could sign his or her name in parish marriage registers; in 1900 more than nineteen people in

twenty could sign; in 1948 more than 90 per cent of children aged between eleven and fifteen had a "reading age" of seven or better; after some slight further improvement to 1952, there was no measurable improvement or deterioration in this measure of literacy up to 1976; in 1979 99 per cent of children aged eleven and fifteen could make literal sense of words on a page and write a short message, intelligible at first reading; by 1983 there had been some further slight gain in reading ability and, less certainly, in writing ability also.

In short, therefore, it seems that by the beginning of the present century the British population was basically literate, that in the first half of the century some real gain in the quality of that literacy probably occurred and that since then things have not changed much, partly because there was very little room for quantitative improvement, at least at the most elementary levels of literacy. If, then, there is little evidence of any decline in the capacity of the consumer to receive the printed word, is there any evidence that demand for it is waning, whether or not because of displacement by television and other distractions?

The output of the paper, printing and publishing industry (measured by the relevant component of the official index of industrial production) declined by an eighth between its historic high in 1978 and the most recent annual figure, for 1983. But much of that reflects the general economic slump; and there is no general evidence of decline over the last thirty years.

Of course, the statistician's definition of the output of the paper, printing and publishing industry has next to nothing to do with the civilized man's concept of the worthwhile fruits of Caxton's great invention. The junk mail, the labels and packaging, the official forms, the cheque-books and bill-boards, the posters, the greetings cards, the telephone directories, the pornographic magazines and the mail-order

catalogues, the company accounts and "offer documents", the Acts of Parliament and *Private Eye* are all one to the statistician with the Bible and the collected works of Shakespeare, Milton and Dickens. We need to know what really is on trial: the printed word; or the written word; or the read word; or the educated word; or simply the word itself.

Indeed, the spectrum of candidates for extinction or survival is far wider and far more subtly graduated. Consider: the printed word intended to be read by the final consumer (Dickens or an income tax form); the printed word (or number) intended to be read by a computer (a cheque); the printed word intended to be read aloud (a child's book); the printed word serving merely as a permanent record of words composed or written to be spoken (Homer, Hansard); the typed, "word-processed", hand-written, carved, painted, "written"-in-the-sky or picked-out-in-pigeons equivalents of the above; the spoken version of the printed, written or otherwise composed word (for example readings on tape by professional actors and actresses of the unabridged texts of the great classics); the spoken version of the word composed to be spoken, but recorded by one means or another on paper or its electronic equivalents (a Pinter play or a Kinnock speech); the spontaneously spoken word intended to be written down and read (dictation, depositions); the spontaneously spoken word intended for instant or later hearing (conversation, recorded "chat" shows); and the word itself – any "verbal" construction however conveyed and/or recorded, contrasted with the non-word (the number, the symbol, the picture, the diagram, the graphic, the sound, the musical note, the grunt or the "body language"). We need to pick out the categories which really matter and to identify the different purposes for which they matter. For example, for industrial and technological purposes it is all-important how the word is conveyed and

recorded, whereas for cultural, educational and aesthetic purposes the focus is on how it is composed and how it is received and understood in the mind.

The future of the printed word is only of absolute importance to a printer – and to those who offer competing systems for recording and conveying words composed and recorded for the various different kinds of purpose which we have already noted. To the extent that words can for the same purposes be more conveniently, cheaply or efficiently recorded and conveyed by computer keyboards, disks, tapes, cables, satellites and screens or by photographic and other innovations, that may be bad news for printers (and perhaps bibliophiles, librarians of the traditional kind and paper manufacturers); but it should be either indifferent or good news for all other word users. There may, of course, be a sentimental, nostalgic or simply a habitual attachment of other word users, especially those over thirty-five, to the printed word and its familiar forms in book, newspaper, magazine and even poster; but this is no more valid, rational or lasting a ground for preference than the fascination, excitement and thrill felt by other word users about the novelty of computers, word-processors, Prestel, "home banking", facsimile transmission and a thousand other new ways of recording and conveying the written word. For here we begin to see the real importance of the distinction, too often glossed over, between the printed word and the written, or more strictly still, composed word. Whatever may be going on on traditional broadcast television – and most of it is composed, written, rehearsed and, indeed, passed through typewriters or word-processors, if not printed – the main threat to the printed word, in so far as there is one, comes from new forms of handling the written or composed word.

The impact on printing of the electronic revolution, which may, incidentally, even save

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the economics of the most threatened parts of the printing industry, is mainly felt, whether in offices or in generally published material, not in the spoken (and broadcast) word taking over from the written word, but in all the new ways of handling the written word itself, for example, the "electronic newspaper" on which the more "far-out" boffins at British Telecom are even now at work. It will be written by journalists, probably of a lamentably unreconstructed kind. It will be spoken by them – or others – on to recording machines. It – together with pictures and graphics – will be transmitted by cables (probably traditional telephone lines) during the small hours to plugged-in domestic recorders. The ordinary "reader" will be able to "read" (ie, listen to) it, browse through it, look at its pictures and generally use, even file it, just like a traditional newspaper, all with the aid of a pocket-sized screen and play-back gadget, plus headphones. Or something like that. The point, however it works technically, is that the whole process will – or would – be dealing in the written or at least composed word without anything being printed and without any paper. Yet, the essential nature of the journalist's role will be unchanged, as will be the nature of the consumer's needs and preferences met in this way. Only the printer will have grounds for regret – and any publisher who fails to adapt to the new technology as and when it becomes cost-effective.

So, let us establish the primary distinction between the printed and the composed word, although of course the composed word may be printed and the printed word almost always has first to be composed. Secondly, let us accept that the printed word, as such, is important and only important in the context of the commercial preoccupations of printers and their direct industrial dependents and technological competitors, while all that matters culturally, if that, is the fate of the written or composed word.

In the very long term the printed word probably is doomed. It will be surprising if, in the year 2100, printing continues to account for more than a negligible fraction of the recording and conveying of the written or composed word. Paper is bound to become progressively scarcer and more costly, quite apart from the environmental inhibitions on limitless depredation of diminishing forests. Space constraints will progressively discourage reliance on the printed word for record-keeping and archival purposes. Electronic and, perhaps, photographic alternatives will go on getting cheaper and better. The economics of distribution will increasingly deter publishers – and the Post Office – from moving gigantic quantities and weights of paper around by the antique and labour-intensive technologies of road, rail and air (let alone sea), although facsimile transmission may spin out the life of the paper-borne word a little longer.

But the electronic competitors to the paper-borne word have a very long way to go before they overwhelm the short-term economic advantages and the centuries of cultural conditioning which still favour the printers, many of whom are doing and are likely to continue to do extremely well – not least, thanks to the energetic application of electronics to their own businesses.

Newspapers, though, face an altogether more challenging threat and a much shorter horizon for survival. This stems from two causes, one of which is structural and the other of which is perhaps not irremediable. The heyday of newspapers depended on two great pieces of pre-nineteenth-century technology: the printing press and the railway, refined and developed in the nineteenth century and finally and fully exploited in the early twentieth century. These were what made possible the two pillars of press economics: daily distribution and mass circulation. On that base and on it alone was built the whole fabric of fast news and quick comment, popular journalism and entertainment, routine information and mass advertising, low cover prices and unrivalled opportunities for political propaganda which inspired and attracted the great newspaper magnates to such extraordinary feats of investment, competition and ruthless dynamism. Thanks to the constraints in the Broadcasting Acts and the BBC Charter, only as a vehicle for political propaganda and for the more specialized and bulky routine information

do newspapers clearly retain their superiority. The pre-nineteenth-century technology no longer dominates either in performance or in cost the twentieth-century technologies of microphone, camera, recorder, transmitter, ether, cable, satellite and domestic receiver. In their spheres television and radio are quicker, better, cheaper and usually preferred.

Newspapers, or some of them, are, however, superior in other ways. They can individually be carried around more easily, read at will in any location, browsed through in any sequence, selected for their preferred style, tone or political bias and consulted for current information, not least about the timing and content of the offerings of the rival medium. They can accommodate, too, vastly larger numbers of words than their broadcast rivals, especially on news and current affairs, and can therefore offer more information in greater depth about a much larger number of stories, to say nothing of carrying classified advertisements and detailed service information.

Even so, what has gone or is going is the peculiar advantage, so important until the 1920s, of fast mass circulation. It is hard to doubt, after allowing for the well-known British tendency to keep institutions alive for at least twenty and sometimes fifty years beyond their useful life-span, that those features which remain comparative advantages of the press over radio and television will progressively be most successfully exploited by more flexible, specialized, local, weekly and/or cheap publications which do not have to compete head-on with the national broadcast media.

The second and perhaps remediable cause of the predicted decline of national newspapers has, of course, been their appalling industrial relations and the grotesque "costs" (an unduly polite word for practices which, when undertaken by other demanders of money with menaces, attract a different name) associated with them. The hazardous nature of the predictive sciences is vividly illustrated by the fact that, just when terminal doom was being confidently pronounced, Eddie Shah, Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch have shown themselves laudably determined to break out at least from the most ludicrous of Fleet Street customs and constraints. It at last begins to look as though they could actually succeed. If they do, they will certainly extend the lease of life of the mass circulation daily newspaper. Even so, in the longer run, for the reasons already given, the structural fundamentals are against the papers (though not the entrepreneurs, who can be expected to be the first to move with the future times). But what of other printed products, which may coarsely be divided into a small fraction of books and near-books on the one hand and the great mass of ephemeral trash, useful as some of it may be, on the other?

Unlike newspapers, which depend on being cheap, fast and mass-circulated, books still get by on being expensive, slow and, comparatively, low-volume. There is no comparable structural threat to the economics of this form of printing – beyond the already mentioned very long-term constrictions on the paper-borne word. Yet, what is a book but closely printed pages, with or without attractive illustrations, bound together with more or less elegance and economy? *Pride and Prejudice* is necessarily a composition, almost necessarily a work of writing. It is only a book because of the crude and artistically neutral facts of word technology over the last 175 years. If you doubt this and if you can rid yourself of the habitual prejudices of a print-dependent culture, buy and listen to Irene Sutcliffe's rendering, unabridged, on Cover To Cover Cassettes, tapes of Austen's masterpiece. You are actually, especially if you are busy and drive about or work with your hands, more likely to reread it, if you do it this way.

But it is not, of course, the purpose of publishing most books, measured by the bulk of the output of self-described "publishers", that they should be read. The money is made just as much, or more, on books which are not even meant to be read, only to be "consulted" or referred to or – more usually – displayed or presented to others. It will take longer for the electronic media to catch up with the appeal of books-as-objects than with their appeal as word-vehicles. But, once the debate is reduced to this level, there seems little left for the cul-

ral Cassandra to gnash their teeth over. However irrational, uneconomic, unhealthy, expensive and spuriously sanctified, the book seems likely to continue to employ the printer for a long time to come.

Other printing has probably an equally secure future for the time being, because, however electronically sophisticated business organizations and a few brave individuals become, they still have to accept that they live in a world that is electronically illiterate; and, therefore, before the product "goes public" it has to be committed to paper – and that means printing. So, the printed word is not dead and has a future. But what of the written or composed word?

I think its future is secure because it is indispensable and fundamental to the whole process of human thought and action beyond the savage level, to the gaining, conveying and retaining of knowledge, to the development and communication of general and abstract understanding and to the creative and artistic use of words. Words are the atoms of language; and language is the *sine qua non* of man's advance beyond the level of the beasts. Words have to be carefully and reflectively put together and available recorded if thought and knowledge are to advance and accumulate. With nothing but spontaneous speech and the human memory, very little if any of mankind's intellectual development could have occurred or reached us. Thus, the composed word, which still for most purposes means in practice the written word in one form or another, is with us to stay. Indeed, thanks to more widespread education, better recording technology and simply more people, there is more of it today than ever before.

The spoken word will, however, survive too; and there is a somewhat more real danger, not of the written word being driven out, but of the

culture of the spoken word and the culture of the written word becoming increasingly divorced from one another. Yet, the written and spoken word use the same language; and, as we have seen, there is an almost infinite series of gradations between the one and the other. The developing inability, or diverging ability, to deal effectively with both and the tendency to separate cultures to develop, each of which turns its back in despair on the other, amount to an ugly and dangerous fragmentation of what needs to be a unitary culture.

If the "official", expert, trained, knowledgeable, academic and professional worlds touch too far with the popular, lay, commercial and political worlds, where in the end the consent of the governed to the actions of the governors is forged or withheld, the democracy will go adrift. Either the people, baffled, will rend the purveyors of the whole arcane apparatus of the "official" written culture; or the lettered establishment will be tempted to disregard and perhaps dismiss as ignorant and vulgar the whole laity, claiming exclusive rights of decision for themselves on the grounds of superior understanding.

The prevention of these nightmares justifies the humble role of the journalist, however modest his or her actual attainments, in holding together the two ends of this fissiparous culture. At a time when journalists' morale, self-confidence in their profession and ethical sensitivity must be at their lowest ebb this year, thanks to proprietorial indifference and industrial adversity, it is worth reaffirming the creed and reminding ourselves that our medium is the word – not just the written, all less the printed, word – and that our essential wares are understanding by "us" of what "they" are up to. All the rest, including if it ever so the death of the printed word, is mere instrumentality and changing technology.

The tyranny of facts

Craig Brown

News coverage in the press has always been doomed to scurry after facts that are already defunct: the heat of the chase distracts news reporters from ever reflecting on the artificiality of their quarry. News events explode, change colour and whizz into nothing with all the speed and excitement of fireworks: those who spend time doggedly sifting through old shells will miss the next firework, a different pattern, a different noise, a different colour. The title of Eddie Shah's newspaper – *Today* – enshrines the absurd time-scale of all daily newspapers: they report yesterday's news as if it were today's while being absorbed in tomorrow, which, when it appears, will be yesterday. The fantasy of a better tomorrow now seems acknowledged by *The Times*, which carries the word "Tomorrow" in large type every day in its top left-hand corner. This is how the stories developed today, the newspapers seem to say, and tomorrow we will understand them. But, of course, tomorrow never comes. The story-telling can never stop, and any story without a previously imposed finale (such as that granted to history, fiction, biography) is resistant to meaning. A volume of the most penetrating newspaper writings about the Westland affair would reveal little other than what was not understood or foreseen at the time. Writing chained to unresolved public facts is destined forever to be reporting; but the distinction between writing and reporting need not be so evident in the large areas of newspapers given to arts and feature writing. Yet it is. The tyranny of facts is growing.

Most people who write for newspapers now have to undergo training courses in colleges or on provincial newspapers, designed to turn their writing into journalism. They are trained to regard what others say and do as having intrinsic meaning; to write not from themselves but from a regard for a corporate house style; to espouse the cause of information over interpretation; to think as an amorphous public thinks. They emerge schooled in cliché, where groups of words link arms to protect the identity of their creator. Their reverence for facts has little of nothing to do with a reverence for

accuracy – the most casual browser through Fleet Street could see that – but rather it is a reverence for whatever is ready and evident and reportable.

The better-regarded American newspapers and magazines have institutionalized this banality, employing "fact checkers" to ensure that there is factual evidence to support each and every word a writer produces. This evidence must usually consist of a previously published journal in which the statement has already appeared, or, in the case of an interview, a clearance with the interviewee that what he is said to have said is both what he said and what he meant to say. Everything that has been said before and thought before originally has no precedent and is therefore unchecked and uncorrected. Irony is taken literally, observation flattened. Facts march in grey battalions, all present and correct. It would be hard to exaggerate the extent of this dreary madness.

This approach, if not these methods, is gaining ground in areas of British journalism traditionally open to the unimpeded writer. In up-market newspaper arts pages, for instance, novelists are interviewed in a manner which suggests that their novels are essentially obscure ways of conveying facts about themselves more convincingly communicated in a chat. When I was asked to review radio for *the Sunday Times*, it was suggested that I put more "analysis" into my pieces: "analysis", it emerged, was what you got after you had telephoned various radio controllers, producers and audience researchers asking them what they thought. Polling is preferred to passion, common sense to individual sense, normality to idiosyncrasy. (Indeed, the very word "idiosyncratic" is today only applied to writers of "humorous" columns.) On books pages, too, the relentless pursuit of the factual to the neglect of the creative is espoused, with blarney of the recent dead awarded more prizes than their novels or poems ever were, and with diaries of dull dead writers taking precedence over the six-to-a-bed round-ups of new fiction. The proud philistinism of the news report is being welcomed in all departments of the press. Before long, the distinction between writer and journalist will be exact and irrevocable.

Alarms and diversions

Paul Smith

ALASTAIR HETHERINGTON
News, Newspapers and Television
320pp. Macmillan. £27.50 (paperback, £9.50).
0333 386051

Journalists, the evidence of this book suggests, do it to please themselves. Alastair Hetherington's fly-on-the-newsroom-wall report on how the headlines are handled in print and on the screen conveys a sense of a group for which frenzied activity comes close to constituting its own purpose, not so much a job as a way of getting through the day without pausing for doubts. You can get ulcers simply by reading the account given here of the hour before the transmission of *News at Ten* on October 31, 1983. Some of the newsmen in this survey rationalize their work in terms of the tastes of their readers or viewers, but the identification of the customers often seems vague. The *Daily Mail*'s news editor allegedly thinks in terms of "the hopes, fears and preoccupations of a struggling middle class", but so broad a spectrum can hardly have been of much guidance to him in deciding whether "Maggie Mauls the Market" should displace a Raffles-type escape from police custody as the paper's "splash". The journalists seem to spend most of their time uneasily closeted with each other: the crony in El Vino's is a more real target for what they write than the man in the Clapham omnibus. They compose their pieces, some of the responses to Hetherington's enquiries tell us, for "their editors, their wives or themselves".

The end of the debate?

Anthony Howard

NEIL POSTMAN
Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public discourse
in the age of show business
184pp. Heinemann. £9.95.
0434 933001

Nearly 130 years ago the famous Lincoln v Douglas debates took place in Illinois. At the first of them, held in the small town of Ottawa, the arrangement was that Judge Stephen A. Douglas should speak first for an hour, Abraham Lincoln would then hold forth for an hour and a half, and finally, that the Judge should respond for the space of half an hour. In fact, that ranked as a rather skimpy occasion: four years previously, at a similar debate held in Peoria, the Judge had opened the proceedings by speaking for three hours, whereupon Lincoln had suggested a supper-break, after which the audience filed back from their homes eager for a further bout of dialectical sustenance lasting a further four hours. Simpler feasts of endurance were by no means unknown elsewhere; at around the same time those attending Spurgeon's Tabernacle in London were said to be disappointed if a sermon did not last well into its second hour.

Whatever else may have happened over the past hundred years, it is sadly evident that the average human attention span has slipped. It has done so, according to Neil Postman, precisely because of the information explosion. Long before the coming of the idiot lantern into every living-room, the invention of the telegraph – and the zealous way in which it was exploited by even small-town newspapers – meant that the kind of discussion pursued by Lincoln and Douglas ceased to have much attraction or relevance. Afloat on a sea of casual information, the normal citizen no longer felt any need to apply himself to serious issues: requiring any thought or action on his own part. The age of mature deliberation had surrendered to the era of meaningless curiosity.

Worse, however, was to come. The invention of the wire photograph gave an air of spurious reality to far-away places of which we knew little and understood less. It put, as it were, "the news of the day" (a concept quite unknown to those who listened rapt to Douglas or Lincoln) into a frame, suggesting that it actually meant something while, in fact, adding nothing to our knowledge or experience. The peculiarity of this dual revolution – involving the

More sociology of this peculiar body, turned at once outward to the whole world and inward on itself, might have helped to explain the kind of product it supplies, but this is a study not so much of what newsmen are as of how they go about their functions, as revealed by extensive fieldwork in both newspaper and television newsrooms, concentrating on the hour-by-hour taking of the editorial decisions which bring what has been judged to be news into the public view, and using the 1984-5 coal dispute as its principal test of the merits and defects of modern news coverage. The cross-section is broad, despite the fact that denial of access to the *Express* and the *Sun* meant the omission of any of the "most strident" popular papers.

Hetherington's long journalistic experience helps him and his collaborators to give an insider's view of the processes which make – as much as register – the news, and of the pace and pressure which are both their essential dynamic and their inescapable limitation. While we are mostly looking at the shaping of raw material in the newsroom, a useful chapter by Innis Macbeath on newspaper reporting of the miners' strike gets across the difficulties of primary news-gathering in the front line. This may be the best available introduction to how news is made. It is certainly among the more optimistic recent studies of the topic. Hetherington has little time for the Glasgow University Media Group. Whatever his reservations about the popular sheets, he finds, especially perhaps in television news, a high level of commitment in Britain to accurate and fair reporting.

The only hint of fundamental unease lies in

the assertion that news tends to be presented in such a way as to reinforce the status quo and discourage major reforms. Perhaps because they want to huddle up to the rest of us for warmth; perhaps because they have so hazy a notion of the audience they are addressing and fear to offend it; perhaps, as some of those quoted here would evidently like to believe, because they represent a cross-section of the society in which they operate, journalists are allegedly prone to "sociocentrism" (the Economic and Social Research Council, which financed some of the research, set a sociologist to mind Professor Hetherington, and one guesses that this is Howard Tumber's term rather than that of the ex-editor of the *Guardian*). Their leading unstated assumption is said to be that "we live in a liberal democracy and want to secure its continuity and harmony so far as possible" – hence a bias against anything tending to rock the boat, though not in this analysis such a strong one as to exclude the representation of minority or unpopular views. It is hard to assess the validity of this thesis without a closer examination of content, especially in the

FIFTY YEARS ON

The TLS of February 22, 1936, published a review by C. H. C. Pirie-Gordon of *Hilaire Belloc's The Battle Ground*, from which the following extracts are taken:

Mr. Belloc's "battle ground" is Syria, and in a characteristic preface he explains that he sees "a special design in the story of Syria and particularly of Israel, reaching a climax at the Crucifixion". . . . In dealing with Islam Mr. Belloc insists upon regarding it rather as so extreme a Reformation as to be a heresy, but not a new religion – a violent reaction in favour of simplicity of life and creed in a world which had become oppressed by the complications of the legal and social systems and the theological hair-splitting of quarrelsome divines. . . . The Greek conquest of Syria, [was] "the best piece of temporal good fortune, perhaps, that ever befell our civilization," for it ushered in "that

great thousand years between the excellent arrival of the Greeks" and the evil advent of Islam. . . . Syria is again, as it was in the days of the ancient Egyptian Empire, a country of racial and religious super-impositions. . . . Antioch, once the capital of the Seleucids and the "Eye of Christendom," is still, he finds, a personality. If so she is like some more than centenary celebrity of other days living in a remote retirement on an exiguous pension, forgotten even by her neighbours and without influence. . . . Nor is Mr. Belloc easy about present conditions in Syria. He finds them artificial and unnatural, and fears what the near Future may hold for the French experiment, the British experiment and the Zionist experiment, all of which, and particularly the last, are distasteful to local Asiatic sentiment. . . .

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The press: international viewpoints

We asked some novelists to comment briefly on what they take to be the outstanding features of journalism in their countries of origin, particularly with respect to press freedom.

South Africa

Christopher Hope

It is impossible for me to think of the English-language press in South Africa without feelings of gratitude. The fact that the term "English press" became for the Nationalist Afrikaner government an expression of abuse was reason enough. But there were others. I did not read the papers for news of sport, or the weather, or the Royal Family, or even for the echoes, impossibly faint and remote, that reached us from the world outside, which we called "overseas". What I got from papers such as the *Pretoria News* and the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Cape Times* were reports from the front line, the latest on the pass laws and influx control, bannings, detentions, police warnings and government threats of worse to come if we did not all toe the line. The English papers did not only report — they reacted, complained, condemned. I got from them the sense of attack which I missed almost everywhere else. The English universities, reduced to all but a token black presence, protested but knuckled under; English politicians, seeing their parliamentary minority further reduced with every election, groaned and fell silent. Through the 1950s, 60s and 70s, the contagion of apartheid, the obedience it demanded and the dullness it bred, touched everything.

The best black journalism began in the 1950s and was to be found in not a newspaper but a magazine called *Drum*. Its publisher and its best-known editors, Anthony Sampson and Tom Hopkinson, were white, but the majority of its readers were black. In its legendary period *Drum* produced a degree of talent that has not been equalled: Ezekiel Mphahlele, Bloke Modisane, Can Themba, Casey "Kid" Mosisi and Lewis Nkosi. The suppression and scattering of these writers left a hole which was not filled for twenty years. They represented a literary flowering which went far beyond anything to be found in the white English press, which had never cared much for matters of style. The English newspapers were really still fighting the Boer War and writers were not needed at the front. Journalists on the white opposition papers might attack apartheid, but the writers at *Drum* (and later at its sister newspaper, the *Golden City Post*) went home to it. *Drum* wrote of the penal conditions of farm labourers, the bulldozing of townships, Miss Africa beauty contests and love across the colour bar; it was racy and streetwise, and established a genuine connection with its readers in the townships. Because its journalists worked at the rock-face of apartheid their writing had a vigour and bite quite unrivalled until the 1970s, when something of the same spirit was revived in the work of poets such as Wally Serote, the township tales of Mphahlele Mzamane and the writers of the magazine *Staffrider*.

The Afrikaans newspapers were organs of the party, and so nothing could be expected from them. They spent their time thanking the minister. Not infrequently they were owned and directed by the minister concerned. Since the racial doctrines of the National Party — "Afrikanerdom on the march" as B. J. Vorster called it — and the interests of the state were regarded as identical, attempts by the English press to empty shops on the troops were regarded as near treason.

Laws were enacted, police dispatched, reporters censured and threats of bannings made with monotonous regularity. Editors were cajoled, and barely a month seemed to go by when the English-language papers were not ritually enjoined "to put their houses in order". For reasons best known to itself, the government preferred slow strangulation to outright decapitation. Demanding obedience with menaces was the way it worked. I can remember in the 1960s how Victor Norton of the *Cape Times* frequently reduced the henchmen of Dr Verwoerd, the apostle of apartheid, to stuttering fury. Norton, summoned before a par-

liamentary committee for contempt of the House, arrived to confirm, not to deny, the charge. On the *Daily Dispatch* Donald Woods showed the same incapacity for obedience. And in Johannesburg the *Rand Daily Mail*, under its formidable editor Laurence Gandar was the paper the government hated most, and thereby won my support and devotion.

By severe contrast, the Nationalist Afrikaner government did not play elaborate games of threats and nooses with the black papers. As it showed in its heavy handling of *Drum* in the 1950s, it always preferred shooting to thinking. When the black paper *The World* stepped out of line at the time of the Soweto riots, it was closed down and its editor arrested. It was about this time that the perversion of language, always a substitute in South Africa for the genuine alteration of policies, reached new levels. The Ministry of Native Affairs, which had changed its name to Bantu Affairs, was renamed Plural Relations. When Percy Qoboza, editor of *The World*, was released from detention five months later, he commented that clearly there were changes in South Africa — he had gone into jail as a Bantu and come out a Plural.

And times are changing. In South Africa, recently, I found myself attending the wake of the *Rand Daily Mail*. On the highveld air I thought I could hear the sounds of government revelry as glasses were lifted to toast the death of the old enemy. It lost its advertisers, some said; others declared that its owners had finished it off. But today comes the news that the government is buying advertising space in the English papers to explain its policies of reform to a sceptical public. Imagine — after all these years... the Nationalists are paying good money for space in the English papers these same papers were twenty years ago being condemned as fools and traitors for urging. Only in South Africa...

Peru

Mario Vargas Llosa

Since July 28, 1980, when President Belaúnde Terry returned to their owners the newspapers and radio and television channels which had been put under state control by the military dictatorship, Peru has enjoyed freedom of expression. The new government of Alan García has respected this policy, and nothing seems to threaten it.

Ideological pluralism can be said to prevail in the dailies and magazines, which cover a broad spectrum of opinion from Marxist-Leninist to conservative, with various shades of social democracy in between. The spectrum narrows when it comes to the radio stations, which all hover around a cautious centrism; and it shrinks to a uniform hue in the output of the six television channels — five private and one state-owned — whose political stance today, now that the APRA party is in power, is as "officialist" as it was under the previous Popular Action régime. It would be unjust to say that the pro-government line of the television channels is the result of government pressures. Such pressures exist, inevitably, but the attitude of the television channels is more likely to be due to a natural tendency of their owners to stay on good terms with the political powers-that-be, especially when the government still has four-and-a-half years to run. The state-controlled sector of the economy, which grew from seven to 170 public companies under the military dictatorship, weighs ominously on the media, and could eventually stifle or subsidize them financially by discriminatory advertising policies.

Although liberty gave birth to a diversity of viewpoints and the possibility of criticism, journalism in Peru is far from attaining ethical and culturally acceptable levels. I am not merely referring to the fact that private owners (and state-owned media too) practise self-censorship in their newspapers and radio and television output, and follow policies guided more by opportunism and commercial greed than principle. I am chiefly referring to the tragicomic fact that freedom in the media continues to benefit the same people who prospered under the dictatorship. The daily *La Prensa*, the majority of whose leader-writers were

exiled by the military régime, collapsed for lack of readers and advertising after democracy reappeared and the paper applied a liberal line and a certain sobriety in its reporting. On the other hand, *La República*, which was founded by former civil servants of the military régime and by journalists who served that régime as "mastiffs" (as General Velasco called them), is possibly the most widely read paper in the country. Its success is due to an all-out descent to the techniques of the "yellow" or gutter press — scandalmongering, gossip, insults and calumnies against opponents, and demagoguery. As if this were not enough, it has an evening sister paper, *El Popular*, whose job it is to churn out the muck that the morning version finds too strong.

These journalistic practices, institutionalized by the dictatorship, have been consolidated rather than repudiated under democracy. The popular dailies have taken to them because they know that this is the best way to win and keep readers, and also because they feel immune from prosecution — what judge would dare "threaten freedom of expression" by sentencing a journalist or newspaper for "libel"? He would immediately become the target of a ferocious campaign by these all-powerful organs run by the former servants of the military régime.

Perhaps I am giving an inaccurate picture by generalizing in this way. It is, for example, true that the conservative *El Comercio* tries to apply a minimal objectivity in its reporting, and does not usually resort to underhand tricks in its polemics; and it is true that there are shades and degrees within the "yellow" press. Nevertheless, the general state of our communications media is desperate: deliberate bias usually has it over objective reporting, "opinion" means lies, and polemics is usually a synonym for insults. And from right to left the media come together in a common lack of interest in culture, which usually appears only in the context of gossip or scandal.

The fact is that the conditioning caused by underdevelopment does not disappear with the advent of freedom. There must be freedom, and we Peruvians must fight to defend it. But we have to do so in the awareness that now we are free, we still have stiff battles ahead in the field of communications in order to win for ourselves a type of journalism which is not only free, but also worthy.

India

Salman Rushdie

To be censored is to be thought powerful enough to be worth censoring, so it's a bit of a backhanded compliment to call the Indian press free. After all, the news media that do reach a mass audience — primarily radio, and, increasingly, television — have long been subject to tight government controls. In a still largely illiterate country, the politicians rule the airwaves; investigation, questioning, dissent become luxuries available only to the educated, newspaper and magazine-reading classes.

Having said which, one must in fairness add that the journalism in much of the English-language press is of high quality. This sector, in spite of serving a small minority (English-readers) of a small minority (readers), has gained and held an influence over national policy and opinion that is, certainly, in part a colonial hangover and in part an indication of the great power of this relatively tiny audience. The Indian middle class is at present remarkably confident and buoyant, and as a result the same can be said of the journals it likes to read.

The fortnightly *India Today*, just ten years old and modelled after *Time*, manages — unlike most agency-dependent dailies — to have enough reporters of its own to cover the whole country, and is a valuable, trenchant voice, as is the political journal *Sunday* and the excellent *Calcutta daily*, the *Telegraph*.

The optimism of the bourgeoisie has also spawned a whole clutch of glossy magazines which are less easy to praise. Based in gossip, titillating, high-rise Bombay, the names of these magazines tell you everything: *Celebrity*, *Society*, *Debonair*, *Gentleman*. They are filled with ads for pricey consumer goods, and the ethos of these magazines looks even more dubious in

impooverished India than their equivalent seem in the West.

The literary journalism to be found in the various journals is not, for the most part, of the same standard as some of the political writing in India, like so many countries, suffers from shortage of writers but of critics. The notion that good criticism is brash, bitchy, and *hominem* and almost always adverse has, sadly, caught on. But, of course, there are some good, useful voices to be heard: Sudh in *India Today*, Meenakshi Mukherjee in the *Indian Express* and elsewhere, the poet Nissim Ezekiel, the erratic but at least passionate Iqbal Masud.

Two leading lights of the Indian press have recently produced first-rate books: M. J. Akbar, editor of the *Telegraph*, wrote *The Stege within* (Penguin), one of the best accounts we have yet been given of communal strife in the subcontinent; and the BBC's legendary Mark Tully, surely an honourary Indian, published an excellent book on the recent troubles in the Punjab. Meanwhile, at least one leading Indian novelist (Anita Desai) has recently been writing inclusive international journalism, first with a profile on Rajiv Gandhi in *The Times*, and then, in the *American Republic*, with an assault on the current Indianmania — "India as Fantasyland" — that both scalding and timely.

Soviet Union

Zinovy Zinik

The art of criticism is the public face of literature. Since literature in the Soviet Union is a surrogate for religion, journalism has become a substitute for politics. Unsurprisingly, in the context of Soviet political life, a piece of Soviet journalism is very rarely about what it purports to be. The subject-matter of an article becomes merely a pretext, a vessel, a suitcase full of forbidden truths which a clever author manages to smuggle between the rigid lines of an ostensibly law-abiding writing. The most blatant example of such misuse of the genre and forms of journalism is the Soviet art of theatre reviewing.

In a state-subsidized and wholly state-controlled culture, theatre criticism has no commercial purpose whatsoever. As a result, nobody seems to be much worried when a theatre review appears in print two or three months after the first night of a production. Since theatre criticism (not theatre as an art form) is rated rather low in the hierarchy of propaganda values because of the relatively small readership, it has been left, for the last two or three decades, more or less in peace by the Party ideologues. For the same reason, theatre criticism is given a licence to use a more complicated literary style than has ever been allowed in the otherwise drab and dull columns of Soviet journalism. The sheer complexity, even weirdness of the theatre as a live reflection of things alive, rearranged on the stage for all to see, also adds a licentious streak to writing on theatre and makes it more colourful, less manageable for ideological instruction.

The Soviet general public regards theatre criticism as something insular, boring and insignificant. Paradoxically, such an attitude allows this genre of writing to grow into something which is appreciated *per se* and related by connoisseurs of the art without any relation to the theatrical event that caused the appearance of a review.

In the mid-1960s, a new trend in theatre criticism emerged, headed unofficially by a Moscow freelance writer, raconteur and moral philosopher, Alexander Asarkin. When life is transformed into an ideological spectacle, when on the stage every theatrical illusion is required to reflect a recent ideological doctrine, the critic can easily treat fictitious stage personages as real characters unmentionable in everyday existence; and can, with the same impunity, ascribe hypothetically dangerous ideas to a stage personage — a trick which allows the writer to talk about these ideas in a way unthinkable in the harsh ideological climate of the Soviet reality. These Puckish jumps from stage into the world and back, from the art of theatre criticism into the most intimate, uncontrollable, freakish, fascinating and exotic creature in the Soviet literary

Letters

'Lost Magic Kingdoms'

Sir, — The passion behind Joseph Brant's protest (Letters, February 7) shows that Eduardo Paolozzi's exhibition carries a powerful message even if Mr Brant has failed to understand what it is. Perhaps I am as competent as Mr Brant to judge whether the show exhibits "anthropological understanding". Suffice that, on the strength of Tom Phillips's review, I made a special visit to London to see the exhibition and came away absolutely delighted, especially with the "old photographs of anonymous natives" which, as far as I am concerned, have the exact contrary effect from "heightening the sense of the exotic".

I have been working on a similar theme for some time and Paolozzi has here given me a whole string of new ideas. Let me assure Mr Brant that the Keeper of the Museum of Mankind knows his anthropological and educational business very well indeed.

EDMUND R. LEACH,
11 West Green, Barrington, Cambridge.

'Goddess'

Sir, — In your issue of November 22, Lindsay Duguid writes in her review of Anthony Summers' *Goddess: The secret lives of Marilyn Monroe* that "the most unsavoury detail is the spectacle of the drunken Marilyn, as part of the cabaret, at a private birthday party for J. F. Kennedy, sewn into a transparent dress and singing a birthday song". That was no private party; Marilyn Monroe sang her birthday song to President Kennedy at Madison Square Garden before a nationwide television audience. The private party given afterwards by Arthur Krim of United Artists was most decorous (I was there). Marilyn Monroe was not "part of the cabaret"; she was a guest. She was most definitely not drunk; indeed, her escort that night was Arthur Miller's father, a gentle and charming old man. Nor, as I remember, was her dress "transparent"; had it been, I doubt that I would have forgotten it.

Lindsay Duguid also contends that the book under review offers "convincing evidence of a crude but effective cover-up which was designed to protect Robert Kennedy from any publicity about his affair with Marilyn, and which seems to have entailed taking him away by helicopter from the scene of her death" in Los Angeles. Kennedy, who had come to California to address a meeting of the American Bar Association, spent the weekend with his wife and four children at the ranch of John Bates in Gilroy nearly 300 miles from Los Angeles. John Bates, an eminent San Francisco lawyer, has repeatedly said that Kennedy was at the ranch all that day and that they had dinner together that night, which was the night of Marilyn Monroe's death.

The suggestion, made in the book, that the FBI would have covered up Robert Kennedy's presence is preposterous. J. Edgar Hoover and Robert Kennedy detested each other; and, as soon as Kennedy stopped being Attorney General, Hoover lost no opportunity to leak to the press material he hoped would harm Kennedy, such as the wiretapping of Martin Luther King. The idea that he would have continued to protect Kennedy in the Marilyn Monroe case is laughable.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.
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'Dreamchild'

Sir, — In his review (Commentary, February 7) of the film *Dreamchild*, which deals with the relationship between Lewis Carroll and Alice Liddell, David Sexton reports how "Ian Holm works hard at quivering, stammering and twitching his eyebrows" when re-enacting Dodgson, as indeed he does.

But surely the point is that Dodgson lost his stammer when in the company of little girls, and in particular Alice Liddell? References to his liberation from such fits are made, for example, in more than one contribution to *Aspects of Alice* (edited by Robert Phillips, 1971). For example, in the extract from Phyllis Greenacre's "The Character of Dodgson as Revealed in the Writings of Carroll" we are

told that "the shyness may have been increased by his stammering and his deafness (left ear), but it was almost all-pervasive, except with his little girls"; and in Roger Lancelyn Green's "Alice" we read, "It must be stressed again that the glorious escape from the stammer while in their [sic little girls'] society was a very strong incentive for Dodgson to seek these friendships."

One can hardly imagine the original story of *Alice's Adventures under Ground* having been narrated to Alice and her friends by Dodgson with a stammering delivery, and in her later recollections the adult Mrs Alice Hargreaves makes no reference to it.

ADRIAN ROOM,
173 The Causeway, Petersfield, Hampshire.

Robert Graves

Sir, — Peter Kemp complains (Commentary, January 24) of *Bookmark*'s "perfunctory résumé" of the career of Robert Graves. Many readers of the perfunctory puff of all the Graves celebratory obituary articles can be presumed to have suffered little disappointment. Where to find something solid on this figure of outside proportions who, intensively in his later decades, treated literature as his own private theatre of the transcendental grotesque? Mr Kemp hungers for talk, word, on the real man; there was no solid interior, here, only the stuff of literary ambience tirelessly fashioned into semblances of genuine concern with literary verity — the lie his model of truth.

Mr Kemp tries to evoke the ghost of the real man he had hoped *Bookmark* would reveal to him. But he is only one of those who have fed themselves on the promotional material that Graves prepared and accumulated for the uses of future fame. His cartoon offering reflects the falsities built by Graves into the literally postured image of a real man, a real poet, a real mind, and the quasi-posthumous falsifications propagated by certain publicity specialists.

I shall comment here on just one feature of Mr Kemp's ghostly rendition of the Graves actually, his lachrymose picturing of Graves' "bruising experiences with female partners like Nancy Nicholson and Laura Riding". This animus-linctured and obscene casting of the two persons who, with kindness to the unpleasant facts of his nature, credited him with the possibility of better (the one in mothering witfulness, the other in intellectually generous and over-generous intellectual comradeship), as characters in the later-life Graves museum of dummy divinities exhibits what can befall literary intelligence that allows itself to be diverted by literary fraud.

LAURA (RIDING) JACKSON,
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Ortega y Gasset

Sir, — Somewhere there must be an Encyclopaedia of Modern European Thought, or some such text, to which all book-reviewers make frantic reference when a translation of José Ortega y Gasset's work arrives on their desk. The encyclopaedia must be as ill informed as the reviewers, because what they get from it is a half-pint glass into which to pour a pint-sized story. It would be fine if the half-pint we get to see in each review were different from the previous one, for then we could build up our own eclectic pint-sized story. But because all the reviewers read the same encyclopaedia, we get the same half-pint and the same generalizations — even in the same order.

To say that Ortega was an existentialist, as does Hayden White in his review (January 31) of *Ortega's Historical Reason* and other works, is true, but misleading by omission. Existentialism is a theory about human beings, and Ortega's enterprise of dealing with unconstructed human life commits him to a rejection of theories about life as nothing better than partial perspectives on it.

Ortega was not an "unrelenting critic of modern science and the kind of 'reason' on which it was based"; if this is taken to mean an outright rejection of such reason, if Hayden White had read Ortega's *Historical Reason* in a more friendly fashion, he would have seen that science's "pure" reason is not an "enemy" to be

"opposed" but a friend with which to collaborate in arriving at a more all-embracing description of human life. Pure reason, like existentialism, is a partial perspective which needs to be complemented.

Nor was he an "unrelenting critic... of technology". As a member of Spain's post-Great War bourgeois class he identified himself almost completely with the industrializing, modernizing aspirations of that class.

Finally, White's statement that "historical reason, on Ortega's account, is more of an attitude than a method of reasoning" shows that if he did read the book he was reviewing, then he did not read it with an open mind. He implies that "methods of reasoning" are something other than attitudes — more worthy and more rigorous. Ortega's point, surely deserving of a second hearing, is that "methods of reasoning" (Cartesian, for example) are themselves attitudes — historical attitudes born of a particular time and place and which therefore need to be understood historically. The history of philosophy, for Ortega, means studying philosophy historically, and if that means "relegating" any given method of reasoning to an attitude — moreover, to an attitude of equal status with all others within a system whose byword is complementarity rather than domination — then so be it. But I don't expect that the Encyclopaedia of Modern European thought deals in such — relative — subtleties.

ANDREW DOBSON,
St John's College, Oxford.

Spender's 'Journals'

Sir, — Michael Horowitz (Letters, January 30) defends love in the language other people use to cover up for crooked politicians, but perhaps that doesn't matter, being rhetoric. In other respects, too, his letter is very much a repeat of Joseph Brodsky's of December 27, and again it surprises me that anyone should feel it sufficient or even useful so late in the day to declare himself on the side of love and Sir Stephen Spender.

Horowitz adds his own dark mutterings about Ian Hamilton's motives and media coverage — why are Spender's champions so jumpy? That mumbbling of the game was hardly serious, and Hamilton's amusing equivocations at least imparted a fleeting vivacity to the corpus under discussion. Inching up for his own look (and hanging on to Brodsky's tautology), Horowitz announces forensically that a "relatively uncommon number" of instances "clearly evidence" love that is not an investment. Would he now care to identify more closely the language of love in Spender's poems? Does the erotic count as "an unimpeachably decent quality"? Does Horowitz find love more or less in evidence after the recent face-lift? (I have only the 1955 version to consult.)

It is hardly impugning the personal sincerity with which Sir Stephen may have held and abandoned his various sexual and political positions over the years, or pointing out more than the obvious, to remark that most of the world's worst poems have been committed in the name of love. Why should Sir Stephen's eminence or amiability owe Hamilton into silence about the *Collected Poems*? It seems to be criticism — "crafted despicion" — that Horowitz finds "profoundly indecent". But this is making heavy weather again.

PETER ROBB,
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The Sacco-Vanzetti Case

Sir, — Hugh Brogan's carelessness about facts led me earlier (Letters, May 31, 1985) to correct an error on the Sacco-Vanzetti case in his review of a book on the Lindbergh case (May 10, 1985). I am now impelled to point out newer errors of Mr Brogan's as committed in his review of *Postmortem: New evidence in the case of Sacco and Vanzetti* by (the late) William Young and David B. Kaiser (December 27, 1985).

Confusing the weapons of Sacco and Vanzetti, Brogan would have Sacco carrying a revolver at the time of his arrest. It was a .32 Colt automatic pistol. Compounding the confusion, Brogan reports that all six bullets recovered from the victims' bodies had been fired from a "Harrington and Richardson pistol". No such weapon ever existed. Vanzetti, when arrested,

was carrying a Harrington and Richardson revolver. (Brogan is also wrong about the recovered bullets; uncontroverted testimony identified five of the six as having been fired in a .32 Savage automatic pistol, and one fired in a .32 Colt automatic.)

The bare story of the revolver is irresistibly intriguing. Alessandro Berardelli, the murdered guard, carried an H and R revolver normally; it was not found on his person. The prosecution theorized that Vanzetti got it in the course of the robbery. The defence claimed that Vanzetti got it from an acquaintance and that Berardelli had carried no weapon at all in the course of his payroll guard duty. One is free to choose one's favourite theory.

While these confusions are Brogan's the authors misled him into another error. Book and review identified the two victims as *guards*. The other victim, Frederick A. Parmenter, was the paymaster. That minor slip suggests slipshod research.

Beyond that, the authors, Brogan applauding, argue their case only by arbitrarily attributing all manner of falsifications, switching of evidence and other frame-up operations to prosecution and police, with lying witnesses assisting them at the trials. For this there is not a shadow of credible evidence, nothing more than an *a priori* conspiracy thesis. (About the possible switching of the ballistics evidence, the authors came into the case so late that they misled themselves into committing the anachronism of assuming that the prosecution and police knew its significance in 1920-1, before ballistics was developed and recognized as a credible applied science.) Their prime villain, Assistant District Attorney Harold P. Williams, wept when the verdict was announced. In his subsequent career he rose, having won universal regard for character and ability, to the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court (where, in 1958, I found him at peace with his conscience and the facts in the course of an interview for my book on the case).

In my previous letter I mentioned the sixteen eye-witnesses who, at one or the other of the two trials, firmly identified Sacco or Vanzetti as active in the crime at issue. Let me add that eleven of the witnesses, at the more important, six-week Dedham trial, stood up to a ferocious cross-examination by Fred Moore, the great International Workers of the World trial lawyer.

The authors have avoided most of the evidence and stood the rest on its head. Kaiser claims falsely that only one student of the case, Robert H. Montgomery, was "impressed" by the evidence. Francis Russell's widely read and respected *Tragedy in Dedham* (1962) studied and used it exhaustively and so did mine, *Protest: Sacco-Vanzetti and the Intellectuals* (1965). Kaiser's frequent references show that he wrestled hard with the Russell book, while he accorded mine a one-sentence mention.

Russell is publishing a new book, *Sacco and Vanzetti: The case resolved*, in the next few weeks. He had begun his researches for the first book with the assumption of innocence framed but was forced to conclude that Sacco was guilty, although he found reason to doubt Vanzetti's guilt. He has come upon recent evidence which he believes confirms his judgment on Sacco, while he reports that an anarchist supporter "swore that Vanzetti was innocent as far as the actual participation in the killing". The prosecution never said that Vanzetti shot anybody, and one could agree that he had been only a little bit pregnant with guilt.

DAVID FELIX,
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The work of the late Philip Larkin is to be commemorated in a programme of readings organized by the Poetry Society and to be presented at the Riverside Studios, Crisp Road, Hammersmith, London W6 on Monday, March 3 at 7.30 pm. Blake Morrison, the poet and Deputy Literary Editor of *The Observer*, will act as compère and there will be readings by Julian Barnes, Alan Bennett and Harold Pinter; Andrew Motion will read his new poem on Larkin, "This Is Your Subject Speaking" (printed in the TLS of February 7). In acknowledgement of Larkin's love of jazz, the Helikon Hotspots Jazz Band will play during the evening.

Eric Korn

Redolence.
Redolence.

This is the property I cherish in a tome, the one message that cannot be digitized, transmitted, encrypted, stored or reproduced, the smell and texture and heft and patina and silverfish and verdigris, the marginal cries of "Rot" or "But vide Cathcart p76", the signatures and thumbprints and peanut-butter stains that attest to its personal history. Association is a part of it - this is the very page of the very book that Marster were reading when he wrote it - but only a part.

You couldn't more quintessentially distill the spirit of colonial Africa than in a shabby paper-covered guidebook I have here, *Zimbabwe - the mysterious Southern Rhodesian Ruins* (London 1934; 2/6d from the High Commission). On the front a faded impi clashes its spears; on the back a sketch-map of six lines serves as a Road Guide to all important Towns and Places of Interest - Victoria Falls, Umtali and the Vumba Hills, Rhodes's Grave, Matop-

pos, and - in smaller type - Wild Game in all Districts. Native Life.

The author-editor, also the curator, makes no claims to scholarship, though he's a decent sort who likes his job and foresees a time when the relics found around the place might be kept in a site museum instead of gracing the mantlepieces of trophy-hunters all over Southern Africa; he starts with one of the most lackadaisical thank-yous that ever got thanked: "acknowledgement is made to the authors of several books of reference".

But he's more meticulous about reprinting the bye-laws: "No person shall interfere with any other person apparently engaged in painting or drawing the ruins or do any act calculated to annoy any such person". There's ambiguity anent that rich "apparently"; for later the curator takes the power to prohibit any person from doing any act.

He has authority, but doesn't pretend to know who built Zimbabwe ("Phoenicians or Carthaginians, Persians, Sabaeans, Grecians, Indians, Chinese or Parsees") though he knows clearly who didn't, and that is the locals, who are ruled out not on archaeological evi-

dence but on what he might have called ethnomoralistic (or as we would more simply put it, racist) grounds:

It is impossible to imagine the Bantu having anything to do with the actual building... whoever was responsible... possessed colossal energy, long continuity of effort, great powers of concentration and extraordinary skill in dry masonry work. It is difficult to associate the Bantu with any of these qualities... It is true the Bantu people have a big capacity for imitation common to all African peoples, and there are ruins in Rhodesia known to have been built by Bantu, but they invariably display a decadent form... It is almost impossible to think that the mentality of the Bantu would be capable of such a conception. It is more than likely that the Bantu were used as slaves, "beasts of burden".

Besides, and here is the clincher, "all the thousands of natives who come to visit the ruins invariably say, on being questioned, that their men didn't build them".

If the identity of the mysterious non-decadent, non-Bantu ruin-builders (I like the idea of a culture of Ruin-builders) remains a mystery, so too does the function of all those great stone edifices. The absence of a roof on one of the taller ("rubber soles may be found of assist-

ance") structures may indicate that it was used for Phallic worship, "since it is accepted that light was regarded as symbolic of Phallic worship" and he has an embarrassed flight of fancy about ministers in gaudy robes and bare high priests conducting their barbarous man sacrifices in Syrophenician Egyptian Parsee style. He ends on a down beat:

"Sofala" or they may be "dakmas", that is special buildings erected for the exposure of the dead and consumption of the birds of the air ("Vultures"). Nothing can be said with certainty. WE DO NOT KNOW.

I expected him to end with "I have spoken" like Allen Quatermain or Umslopogea. He's happier talking about the monument to the gallant Shangani patrol that was done in Lobengula's men: "they fell fighting for the expansion of Empire", said the inscription. I did, though I bet it doesn't any more, or the pleasures of the Zimbabwe Hotel and the (non-licensed) Glenlivet Holiday Resort - homemade brown bread and marmalade, water and a most unique golf course. It was we went to Africa for.

Yes, you can see a lot through its red ochre lens, and the flyleaf is inscribed "Huggins August 1935". Doubtless there were lots of Huggins in Central Africa, but one of them was Godfrey H., surgeon (recreations polo, golf and horticulture) author of *Amputation Stumps, their treatment and after-care* and Prime Minister for twenty years of Southern Rhodesia and for three more of the Federation, later Viscount Malvern of Rhodesia and Bexley and thereafter frequently to be heard airing views not dissimilar in respect of the Bantu's capacity for large projects to those of the Curator of the Ruins of Zimbabwe, which doubtless, in a sense he thought he was.

* * *

Reading a recent number of the *Mechanist Magazine* (relatively recent, about 1834 in point of fact) I came across a suggestion that seemed to have a lot of merit. Man called Snowden looking at railway carriages, had a brainwave, took out a patent. Take a few seats out of each carriage, replace by cogged wheel, connected by cunning gearing to wheels underneath. Find two boxes of brawny working-class chaps to turn the wheel they could have a sort of treadmill arrangement, splendid exercise for the calf musculature, of a kind of rowing-machine apparatus, equally good for the biceps. Dispense with locomotive entirely, save 100 per cent on coal: "expense of fuel and inconvenience of smoke altogether done away with, accidents and explosions rendered impossible". Save on engineering costs, don't need to level off the ground; effort efficiently adjusted to load, fellows just coast downhill, work a little harder on the upgrade. I won't give his figures, based on undercutting the Liverpool and Manchester Ry Co's 2d per passenger-mile, twopenny three farthings per ton; but the principle is plainly as valid as ever. United strength of four men in the shafts would produce 1440lb of force, sufficient to propel "for what might be termed a working day of eight hours", three tons at twenty miles per; not quite your Intensity 125, but no problem of burning brake linings either. But the great advantages are not environmental or financial but social: "the grand object is obtained, that of securing employment for the many individuals now seeking work but looking for it in vain"; no longer pretext for gloomy Malthusians to speak of redundant population, "neither will any willing labourer be afterwards be driven to participate the pauper's mess for want of remunerative employ, but on the contrary the whole body of society will receive a new and vigorous impulse that cannot fail to diffuse health and happiness to all".

I see no possible objections. The Greens will be enthusiastic, the market forces will be mobilized, unemployment will vanish, a series of strokes, employers no less public-spirited than in 1837 will put them before technology, inflation will be frustrated and Victorian values will triumph again.

We apologize once again to readers who, owing to industrial action, have had difficulty in obtaining the *7LS*. Direct postal subscriptions have not been affected.

Progressive lights

Marina Warner

Women Stained Glass Artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement
William Morris Gallery, Forest Road, London E17, until March 2
Underground Women: Designs by Women Artists for London Transport
London Transport Museum, until May 6

"Superman", says the legend on the hammer of a labourer at an anvil, forging a sphere of the world. He is not wearing the familiar red and blue costume, however, but a medieval craftsman's tunic, and he sports the unmistakable beard of Superman's coiner himself, George Bernard Shaw, in this cartoon for a stained glass window commissioned in 1910 from the artist Caroline Townshend. G.B.S. is not alone among the "Fabians at the Forge" in her design: arranged like donors in an altarpiece, various others kneel below - Maud Pember Reeves, Aylmer Maude, and the artist herself - while Sidney Webb assists at the anvil and E. R. Pease plies a pair of bellows as they "remould it [the world] nearer to the heart's desire".

Caroline Townshend is one of a surprising number of women stained glass artists documented in this exhibition, women who were fostered by the Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the century and were taught in the centres of its influence - in London by Christopher Whall, leading practitioner of the art, and in Birmingham, where Whall's pupil Ilery Payne continued his traditions. Peter Cornack, the deputy keeper of the William Morris Gallery, has explored a new area of both social and art history here by gathering together so many examples of women's work in this overlooked field. From secular curiosities like Caroline Townshend's allegory of Fabian reform to Mabel Espin and Joan Fullelove's windows for the Gordon Memorial Chapel in Khartoum, the exhibits raise interesting questions about vernacular iconography (all those memorial windows and front hall lights) and about women's employment in the arts.

Stained glass, of its very nature, resists museum display, and cartoons are not the equivalent of sketches towards sculpture or painting. Colouring-in gives no idea of the glow and variation achieved by the precious slab glass favoured by the Arts and Crafts Movement. There are some small windows on show: in Margaret Rope's "Goblin Market", the veined oak-leaves, spoked undersides of loostools, and the handwoven rush basket the smiling tabby cat is carrying suggest how keenly observant the drawing and painting could be in the final stage. But many of the preliminary designs on paper are as distant from the finished windows as a dressmaker's toiles are from the final costume.

Caroline Townshend, like most of the artists represented, used the workshops of the Glass House, which was opened by the artist Mary Lowndes with Alfred J. Drury (no relation to the sculptor), in Fulham in 1897. Both Townshend and Lowndes designed posters and banners for the Suffrage movement; Lowndes was Chairman of the Artists' Suffrage League and her range of activities as an artist and a campaigner will be explored in Lisa Tickner's forthcoming study of Suffrage iconography. The absence of stained glass on this theme no doubt indicates a shortage of like-minded patrons: G.B.S. was probably as unusual in wanting politically progressive lights as he was in other matters.

The main seam of commissions was provided, naturally, by the Church and, after the First World War, by the families of the dead. Many of the artists were believers: Margaret

The two final lectures in the series organized by the John Hansard Gallery at Southampton University are by Elizabeth Goodall, Assistant Curator at the City Art Gallery, who will discuss the Gallery's collection, and Andrew Collis, an art-dealer and private collector, who will talk about his personal collections. The lectures are on March 5 and 12 at 7.30 p.m. at the John Hansard Gallery, University of Southampton.

Rope became a Carmelite nun, and continued to work from her convent, sending up her designs to Lowndes and Drury. In stained glass iconography, Anglicans and Catholics alike turned to the lives of the saints, rather than to the dominant Christian mysteries. These designs, from cathedrals, parish churches and private shrines, are wishfully dedicated to the making of saints, to the hope that the dead heroes have joined the ranks of the blessed.

Few people would be able to distinguish in this material the Protestant doctrine of intercession from the Roman: there are legends here (St Nicholas); rare miracle workers (St Gamaliel); local saints (St Hugh of Lincoln, St Hilda of Whitby); newly affirmed ones (Reformation martyrs like John Finch, James Bell and Ralph Sherwin); secular heroines (Florence Nightingale), and recent Christian soldiers ("Bishop James Hannington martyred in Uganda in 1885"). All these historical, or semi-historical figures testify to the artists' trust in the human potential for good and the divine promise of salvation, a trust characteristic of the Arts and Crafts spirit, that now seems as forlornly dated as the accoutrements the movement favoured, the quilt pens, falcon hoods, lily wands and chivalric armour of its pantheon.

Underground Women, an exhibition of the graphic work of some forty women artists for London Transport, does not carry out such a feat of reclamation as the Morris Gallery, though it, too, responds to contemporary widespread curiosity about women's activities in the past. It would be hard to make a case for a female iconography from the work on show, or for women's place in the métier - though it is possible that women were preferred as illustrators of country pleasures and family idylls. Sisters to Pomona and Flora themselves, they were perhaps thought suited to beckoning the commuter towards the green fields at the end of the District Line, urging workers to leave chimney-stacks for the primroses of Ongar or Richmond. The Big Smoke that dominates these visions of escape has partly gone, and so have other, smaller smokes celebrated here, but now censored in such public imagery: in Vera Willoughby's "General Joy" of 1928, a couple on top of an open bus are lighting up, tip to tip.

Laura Knight's poster for the Serpentine shows characteristically vigorously modelled young swimmers, and reveals by the way that a girl can appear half-dressed on the tube without giving you the eye. Otherwise, Dora Batty and Heather Perry stand out in their bold use of colour and Art Deco geometry: Perry's lively footballers are made from used tickets.

London Transport no longer commissions advertisements from individuals, the museum's leaflet tells us, only from agencies; the Architect's Department, on the other hand, has recruited energetically and imaginatively for its recent facelift of the tube stations. Julia King's drawings for her clever, cool snappers at Shepherd's Bush turn the shadow of a haystack into a chimney and the profile of a hedge into the roofs of a factory, and so continue to develop the dream of the tube as link between urban and pastoral.

AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 266

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office no later than March 14. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date, or falling that the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked "Author, Author 266" on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, *The Times Literary Supplement*, Priory House, St John's Lane, London EC1 4BX. The solution and results will appear on March 21.

1 His figure was striking, but not so from grace: it was tall, and though extremely thin, his limbs were large and unspindly, and as he stalked along, wreath in the black garments of his order, there was something terrible in the air; something almost supernatural. His owl, too, at it threw a shade over the livid paleness of his face increased its severe character, and gave an effect to his large melancholy eye, which approached to horror.

2 The old man sat at the packing-case in the little dry



A detail from "Goblin Market", stained-glass panel of 1905 by Margaret Agnes Rope (1882-1953), from the exhibition at the William Morris Gallery reviewed here.

The spooky school

Jonathan Brown

Art Nouveau Designs from the Silver Studio Collection
The Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow, until March 27
Mackintosh Metalwork
Mackintosh House, Glasgow, until August

The Silver Studio was founded by Arthur Silver in 1880, and only ceased work just over twenty years ago. The full archives of the firm have been the basis of conservation, cataloguing and study at Middlesex Polytechnic, which has published a stimulating catalogue to an exhibition of the Art Nouveau designs which were the firm's most significant effort. In the essays in the catalogue, we learn that the term "Art Nouveau" was only one of many applied to the new vogue for clarity, sweep and detail that came to replace the heavy and stuffy mid-Victorian taste. Others included the "modern" and the "quaint" styles, and the New Renaissance; Gleeson White, first editor of *The Studio*, called the etiolated and elongated style which we may now associate most with Charles Rennie Mackintosh, "the spooky school". In both of these shows this fact helps to remind us of how determinedly avant-garde and enlightened the trend was at the time.

The new taste had a moral and social component. We may now have to be careful about describing certain colours or patterns as "feminine", but a hundred years ago this stood for an invigorating innovation against the starchy and bullying Victorian decoration, and suggested an attitude of free-thinking and enjoyment. By virtue of a more widespread technology, and an ever-expanding middle class, these florid,

undulating and definite designs also became quite easily available, and brought with them a fresh appreciation of subtle colours and generous patterns. Indeed, in the influence of the Orient, its flat perspectives and curious birds and plants especially, as well as in the extent to which the firm's trade concentrated on Europe and the United States (comparatively recently united, after all), a surreptitious rebellion against Victorian righteousness and Imperial morality can be detected. The geographical taste of the designs ignores the Empire in favour both of the East and of the old and new Europes, and their moral tone ignores regimentation in favour of choice and expanse. It seems true to the spirit of this that the most influential and longest-lived shop associated with the movement should have been called Liberty.

The display of Mackintosh's metalwork (in the adjoining Mackintosh House) is small, but revealing. It consists of items from the first years of the century, and some pieces made in the last two years by Sabbatini, an Italian firm in Bregnano that has followed certain Mackintosh designs more or less closely. One of these, a vivid but simple bowl on four futuristic supports, has been taken from a drawing Mackintosh made of some furniture; there is no indication that the bowl he drew there, on a table, was ever made, or even was drawn, for such a purpose. This creative reconstruction in a setting that is properly speaking historical is welcome and instructive. It may help separate Mackintosh's individuality and modest humanity from the all-too-limiting names such as Art Nouveau and Art Deco. He stands between the two. In the clarity and elegance of his work he belongs to the former; but in the unlively, thin, straight lines of his furniture he reflects the sadness that lies beneath Art Deco.

happened, where the very walls they touched and floors they trod could have told secrets and named names, where every surface was a blurred mirror of life and death, of the endured, the remembered, the forgotten. Yes, the place was h— but they stopped at sounding the word. And by morning, wonderful to say, they were used to it - had quite lived into it.

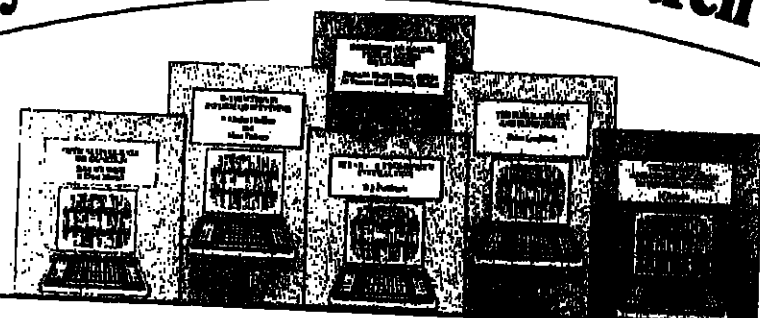
Henry James, "The Third Person".

2 A ghost may come; For it is a ghost's right. His element is so fine. Belong sharpened by his death, To drink from the wine-breath While our gross palates drink from the whole wine.

W. B. Yeats, "All Souls' Night".

3 If thou art privy to thy country's fate, Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O speak. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, I, 1.

Library and Information Research Reports



The British Library publishes a series of conveniently sized paperback reports on those aspects of librarianship and information science likely to appeal to a wide audience of professionals and the public.

Office automation and information services: final report on a study of current developments by T D Wilson. 81p, 1985. LIR Report 31 ISBN 0 7123 3045 3 £11.00. The author looked especially at text preparation and editing, electronic mail and messaging, routine support systems, filing and retrieval systems, and decision support systems.

Technology and communication in the humanities: training and services in universities and polytechnics in the UK by M Katzen. 131p, 1985.

LIR Report 32 ISBN 0 7123 3046 1 £11.50. A survey investigated the training provided in locating reference sources, the extent of online searching available for humanities users, the provision of instruction on techniques of oral and written presentation and the availability and use of computers in the humanities in academic institutions.

Optical character recognition: the technology and its applications in information units and libraries by John W T Smith and Zinat Merall. 137p, 1985.

LIR Report 33 ISBN 0 7123 3047 X £17.00. The report shows where OCR fits in the range of electro-optic devices and includes a brief history. It describes the results of a survey of special libraries and information units. OCR applications are considered, as are surveys of available machines and OCR bureaux. Lastly there is a simple guide to choosing an OCR machine.

Interaction in information systems: a review of research from document retrieval to knowledge-based systems by Nicholas J Belkin and Alina Vickery. 258p, 1985.

LIR Report 35 ISBN 0 7123 3050 X £20.00. The researchers are concerned with the interaction of users with information systems including the interaction of users with skilled intermediaries carrying out searches on their behalf.

The public library and blind people: a survey and review of current practice by Peter Craddock. 122p, 1985. LIR Report 36 ISBN 0 7123 3051 8 £15.00. Few libraries have identified the blind as a target group and the dominant role is one of referral to other agencies. Current trends in information technology and tape services provide incentives for libraries to establish or review policies and become more involved.

ORDERS

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Library services to older people by Marianne Dee and Judith Bowen. 194p, 1986.

LIR Report 37 ISBN 0 7123 3056 9 £12.50.

The report assesses the extent to which public libraries have recognised the needs of older people and have made specific arrangements for them. Examples of effective use of library resources include their application in bibliography, in local clubs and in cooperation with self-help groups.

Designing an online public access catalogue: Okapi, a catalogue on a local area network by Nathalie Nadia Mitrev, Gillian M Venner and Stephen Walker. 268p, 1985.

LIR Report 39 ISBN 0 7123 3058 5 £20.00.

There is a full description of Okapi under the headings: source file, indexing, search function, user interaction and evaluation. There are also chapters on online public access catalogues in general, local area networks and recommendations for future research.

BLEND-4: user-system interaction by D J Pullinger. 88p, 1985. LIR Report 45 ISBN 0 7123 3070 4 £15.00.

The author describes the interaction of a group of users with the Birmingham and Loughborough Electronic Network Development (BLEND) system over a four-year experimental period.

British National Bibliography Research Fund Report

The Fund exists to support research on the general use of books, and the relationship between publisher, bookseller and librarian, and now focuses on the impact of information technology on the book world.

Books in Wandsworth by Sandra Cook. 100p, 1985. BNB RF Report 18 ISBN 0 7123 3048 8 £10.50.

Research was undertaken concerning the use, value, effect and impact of reading materials for all purposes by questionnaires, interviews, observations and testing of the Wandsworth adult lending libraries and 10 local bookshops and book retailers.

QUERIES

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COMMENTARY

Intensely individual

Peter Kemp

Arenn: Marguerite Yourcenar
BBC2

Arenn's programme on Marguerite Yourcenar was lavishly stocked with classical statuary. Repeatedly, the camera closed in on marble musculature and sculpted torsos, Roman busts and antique profiles. This solidly established the cast of her imagination, with its urge to unearth emblematic figures from the past through feats of fictional excavation. Trenchant delvings into history are, for Yourcenar, an essential aspect of writing. Even her first fictional work, *Alexis*, primarily an apology for homosexuality, also carefully exhumes "a milieu, a time, and a land now vanished from the maps": aristocratic nineteenth-century Moravia. Even an acutely contemporary novel like *A Coin in Nine Hands* - written in 1933 about what was happening in the Fascist Italy of that year - doesn't show itself remarkably keen-sighted about the nature and direction of Mussolini's régime, but constantly stares back through time. In a Rome become once again imperial, people are surrounded by reminders of the Caesars, and even physically bear signs of having been moulded by their city's heritage. Like all of Marguerite Yourcenar's characters, they are at once intensely individual and still held in the matrix of history.

True to her belief in the importance of this matrix, Marguerite Yourcenar has largely devoted the first two volumes of her memoirs to reconstructing the ancestral background from which she was to emerge; as yet, she herself has scarcely featured in the story. So it was intriguing to see if Peter Conrad's *Arenn* investigation might extract anything more personal. In the event, it did not, confining itself to brief mention of her family, then devoting most of its time to two of her historical novels, *Memoirs of Hadrian* and *The Abyss*.

As is demonstrated by *Fires* - the strange book that registers her attempts to come to terms with a love crisis by alternating reworked classical legends with extracts from an intimate journal - Marguerite Yourcenar is a writer concerned not just with history but also with personal experience. The chief aim of literature, she has said, is "individuality of ex-

pression". So it was a pity that *Arenn* was not able to establish factors forming her own individuality or convey more of a sense of the distinctive personality apparent behind the personas of her fiction. No indication was given, for instance, of the view of life she has recorded in her lapidary prose, where incisive sentences offer incisive observations on human nature as well as the nature of human history. Her very individual beliefs about the interaction of the physical and the moral, her original analyses of psychological and emotional states, got by-passed in the film's commentary. And even aspects of her classicism were overlooked - such as the unillusioned sober sensuousness her writings advocate or the unwavering precision that hallmarks her mind and style.

While not brought out by the programme's account of her writings, this latter trait did invigoratingly surface during its interview with her. Talking in her home on Mount Desert Island off the New England coast, Mlle Yourcenar resolutely refused to be budged from accuracy. Rejecting Peter Conrad's suggestion that Zeno of *The Abyss* is "your Hamlet", she pointed out that Hamlet doubts but Zeno searches, which is "not at all the same thing". Dodging away from invitations to see herself in category terms as a woman writer or a modern writer, she uncompromisingly insisted on her individuality.

Twice, statements on the large side from Virginia Woolf were produced for her inspection. The first - a claim that women have "a quite different imagination, a quite different perception of the world" from men - was brushed aside with polite firmness as too baggily simplistic to fit the facts. The second - Woolf's lament that she was "horrorified to think that her death would be the one experience she would not be able to describe" - provoked an outburst of robust amusement: "Oh my gosh. I'm shocked. Because what importance given to the art of writing. Who cares if she describes it or not?" Throughout the interview, tough, lucid sanity of this kind kept ringing out - as it does through Marguerite Yourcenar's writing - making the programme an irresistible piece of television. It was a useful one too, for, while the monumental nature of her fictional achievement wasn't fully encompassed, sufficient vistas were opened on to it to encourage further and closer inspection.

casts a most peculiar shadow over the young lovers' romantic negotiations about their futures. A sombre tone is also established by a set which has all the solid elegance of the Citizens' earlier productions of Goldoni, but with the addition of much black drapery and costume. A funeral quality even seems at times to inform the company's pace, slowed from the beginning by a longish overture of wordless action, set to sad music behind the gauze half-curtain which separates the stage into two main acting areas. Though this opening conceals establishes elegiac feelings to be developed later, it also rather encourages the audience's attention to wander. Jonathan Phillips as Florindo and Dominic Arnold as Sebastian are not consistently successful in recovering it.

More successful performances come from Rupert Farley, pertly witty as an Arlecchino-like servant, and from Giles Havergal in the Pantalone role of Clara's father. Though their comic relief is thoroughly welcome, its reminder of the origins of Goldoni's comedy in the vitality of *commedia dell'arte* fits awkwardly with Macdonald's transference of the action from the Bologna of the original to a prosperous, dignified Hamburg. The sombre background music and the seriousness with which Florindo scrutinizes personal convictions and principles move the play almost into a mood of German romanticism, as if the company had not yet exorcised the demons of their recent excellent *Faust*. The introduction of such Germanic seriousness alongside other features of the production's dark vision is interesting in itself, but its insistent solemnity sometimes seems to stifle rather than sharpen Goldoni's comedy.

An end to pageantry

David Trotter

HOWARD BARKER and THOMAS MIDDLETON
Women Beware Women
Royal Court Theatre

In Howard Barker's *Fair Slaughter*, a British officer returns from fighting the Bolsheviks with a bag full of icons, while a private rescues the severed hand of a freedom-fighter. The officer tells the private that the icons are "the legacy of the past to the present". "They are Man in contemplation, in wisdom, serenity and repose, whereas you are Man in stinking sweat." One values a past he cannot change, because he cannot change it; the other consecrates only the perishable, and so renounces the past altogether. Now, by re-writing Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, Barker has explored a third possibility. He has revalued the past by changing it, by discovering in it not the serene but the stinking perishable. What better place to look for severed hands than revenge tragedy?

The first four acts of Middleton's play have been condensed skillfully to form Part One of Barker's. Livia's plotting has procured Bianca for the Duke, Isabella for the Ward and Hippolito, and Leantio for herself. At this point, Middleton's characters succumb to their own excitability and lack of scruple. Barker's, by contrast, begin to articulate power and sexuality. They learn new pleasures, new skills and new vocabularies. With the acquiescence of the Cardinal, the Duke plans his marriage to Bianca as an exercise in the symbolism of power, in "violence and pageantry". His subjects plan to resist him. Livia and Leantio throw away *The Joy of Sex* and strike "seams not of comfort but of truth". The Ward reveals an unexpected cunning. Sordido begins to live down to his name; his rape of Bianca will be the act of violence to put an end to all pageantry.

The play's director, William Gaskill, sug-

gests that "whereas Middleton sees sex as a liberating revolutionary force in society, Barker sees a liberating revolutionary force in society. But the play he has directed hardly bears him out. Although Leantio and Livia do achieve a kind of freedom, the implication of their desire in revolutionary politics drives them apart and they are forced to recognize that desire means different things to each of them. As the Cardinal points out, 'an idea has come between them'. Similarly, Sordido's rape of Bianca could very well be seen as mere counter-violence (or counter-pageantry).

In a useful programme note, Jonathan Dollimore argues that Barker's concern is with rejection as much as liberation. "So this is a play which dramatises both conceptions of desire, because at the mercy of power, desire is a liberating force. Or rather, by creatively realising the earlier play, Barker sets up a dialectic between the two. And it's a dialectic which we're living now, in a society which has incited and represses sexuality." The sweetening of the dialectic uncovered by re-writing. At the end of the play, Leantio and Livia are still sweating, still caught between the joy of rejection and the joy of liberation.

It is a lucid piece of theatre, and very well performed, particularly by Maggie Siff and Livia and Simon Russell Beale as the Ward. But the talk of creative vandalism doesn't altogether silence the thought that Middleton has been revisited in order to be punished or pitied. What we of the dialectic cannot quite forgive is his willingness not only to state a dilemma, but to interpret and resolve it. We feel that he was wrong to kill off all the plotlines and let the Cardinal stand in judgement over carnage - "Sin, what thou art these ruins show too piteously" - as though the pile-up of bodies might not be appropriate to a world of skilful desires and instantly reversible convictions, and as though an exhausted reliance on moralism wasn't in its way evocative of crisis. If that's just dramatic convention, then we can afford to be complacent about our rulers.

A shift of taste

T. O. Treadwell

SIR JOHN VANBRUGH and JAMES SAUNDERS
A Journey to London
Orange Tree, Richmond

Vanbrugh abandoned his last comedy *A Journey to London* at a moment of dramatic crisis in the fourth act. After his death in 1726 the manuscript came into the hands of Colley Cibber, who revised and completed it, and the resulting work, retitled *The Provok'd Husband* was produced in 1728 and became one of the most popular plays of the eighteenth century.

Cibber's treatment of *A Journey to London* illustrates the shift in taste away from the brilliant and cynical world of the Restoration wits to the moral and sentimental comedy of the next generation. Vanbrugh's version centres on Sir Francis Headpiece, a boorish country squire who has become a member of Parliament and has brought his silly wife, pert daughter, and lumpy son with him to London, where they become the immediate prey of a sophisticated collection of lechers, sharpers and bawds; a subplot deals with the relationship between the sensible and civilized Lord Lovelace and his wife, a frivolous coquette who surrounds herself with tops and gambles away the housekeeping. In Cibber's version, the clownish Headpiece family are relegated to the subplot and sent back to the country having come to no real harm; the chief villain repents; and the play ends in tearful reconciliation as Lady Lovelace comes to a sense of her own folly and her husband's nobility and vows to devote herself in future to her wifely duties.

The amoral and sardonic vision of Restoration comedy appeals to twentieth-century sensibilities, and to complete *A Journey to London* in a spirit more consistent with Vanbrugh's vigorous beginning than the pallid pieties of Cibber's recalcitrant ending is an admirable idea. Alas, James Saunders's version offers all Cibber's sentimentality without the dramatic coherence

of his conclusion.

Vanbrugh's scenes, very heavily cut and adapted, provide Saunders with the opening twenty minutes or so, after which his play veers off in another direction. Without any dramatic logical transition, Vanbrugh's Betty Headpiece, the bumptious squire's spoiled and petulant daughter, emerges as an ill-used heroine, languishingly alive to the injustices and hypocrisies of a society ruled by men. Her rustic accent mysteriously evaporates, and she joins with Martilla (a courtesan in Vanbrugh's play, now a love-lorn maiden betrayed) in a plot to punish the latter's seducer Colonel Courtly, a cynical rake in the original, but now a romantic and sympathetic figure cursed by his sense of the transience of the heart's affections. The rational Lord Lovelace becomes an ineffectual buffoon entirely dominated by his wife, whose wilfulness becomes a constant rebellion against masculine authority.

The ideas about emotional freedom and the creation of stereotypes that Saunders's version of *A Journey to London* are concerned with are neither trivial or necessarily undramatic; the problem is that they cannot be made to grow naturally out of the material Vanbrugh left. In the original, for example, Lady Lovelace refuses to pay her draper the fifty guineas she owes him because she needs the money to gamble with. The function of this scene in the original is to stress Lady Lovelace's callousness and her husband's inability to control her. In Saunders's version, the subplot is to stress Lady Lovelace's callousness and her husband's inability to control her. In Saunders's version, the subplot is to stress Lady Lovelace's callousness and her husband's inability to control her.

Had Saunders radically recast the original scenes, or even dispensed altogether with the original, his themes might have been dramatized effectively; as it stands, the play makes much of Vanbrugh for coherence and too little for comedy.

Ruling the extended family

Hugh Trevor-Roper

JENNY WORMALD
Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of manrent, 1442-1603
475pp, Edinburgh: John Donald. £30.
085916 1274

In the last century and a half before the Union of Crowns, Scotland was torn by faction: "feuding" between the powerful families was then inflamed by political intrigue during royal minorities and, in the later years, religious war. All observers remarked on this. In the reign of Charles I, William Drummond of Hawthornden looked back with disgust to the "deadly feuds and divisions among the nobles and gentry": how the great houses were "so joined and linked together by kindred, alliances, bonds of service, or manrent, that no gentleman of any quality, although a malefactor and a guilty person, could be presented to justice without some stir, commotion or tumult of the grandees and their factious friends". It was one of the horrors of Scottish life from which James VI was so glad to have escaped to England; and, once safely settled there, he could take some pride in having ended, or at least checked, the trouble. But the memory of a remained and would be regularly recalled, by the historians of the Enlightenment, as the most obvious character of the world they had (happily) lost. "That turbulent kingdom", wrote David Hume, "was rather to be considered as a confederacy, and that not a close one, of petty princes than a regular system of civil polity"; and William Robertson described the "leagues of mutual defence" among the nobility as "so many alliances, offensive and defensive, against the throne".

The essential mechanism of these leagues, alliances, confederacies was the peculiarly Scottish device of "bonds of manrent", which became common in the period 1450-1600 and are the subject of *Lords and Men in Scotland*, this valuable work by Jenny Wormald. These were written instruments whereby Scottishmen - generally lords, lairds or burgh officers - granted their personal service, and that of their dependants, to greater men in return for "maintenance" and protection. The relationship was not feudal: there was no grant of land or oath of homage. Nor can it be likened to the almost contemporary "bastard feudalism" of England, for there was no financial bond, nor livery. The initiative lay with the grantor, who came to the lord's house to sign the bond and swear an oath, with his hand on the Gospel. Unlike the feudal charter, the bond was always in the vernacular. It was signed, sealed and witnessed; and the original was kept in the lord's charter chest. Sometimes a corresponding bond of protection was given by the patron to his client; and in the later years of the period - after 1550 - the two mutual obligations of manrent and maintenance could be recorded in a single document of contract.

A large number of these bonds of manrent survive among the records of Scottish noble families, and over 800 of them are printed or summarized in an appendix to Dr Wormald's book. The form varies greatly - to the end it remained flexible and individual - but its variations were on a theme. The grantor begins with a public declaration that he has bound himself to his master, in order that he may be assured of maintenance and defence in his own just affairs and quarrels; he then undertakes always to warn his master if he learns of any harm or danger intended to him; to give him the best advice that he can; to guard any secrets which his master may divulge to him; and "to ride and wage" with and for him and take his part in his lawful and lawful and honest quarrels. These general promises are always qualified by a saving clause reserving primary allegiance to the Crown, so that technically at least they did not threaten royal authority.

Often the terms of the bond are spelt out or qualified in detail. Although service is normally granted for life, some bonds are for more clearly limited periods - eg, during a minority which will terminate, or while the patron holds a particular position of authority which puts him above the client; for one does not seek "maintenance" from an equal (though one can and one self to "friendship"). On the other hand, some bonds (especially after 1500) go

further and bind not only the grantor but his heirs to the patron and his heirs. The undertaking to "ride and wage" could similarly be particularized and limited. A grantor would oblige himself to "ride and wage" in "hosting, peace or war", "on foot or horse", at his own expense; or he might stipulate that he would only serve, or only serve at his own cost, in his own area of Scotland or in the wars of his patron or of the Crown. Hunting could also be included in this clause, sometimes at the lord's expense, sometimes at the grantor's. But there are also blank cheques: bonds by which the grantor commits himself to "ride and wage" whenever required by the lord or any in his name, at any hour, day or night. Finally there would be a penalty clause. Failure to fulfil the terms of the bond could be punished by a fine of variable amount. More often, the penalty was loss of honour, infamy, perpetual defamation, etc. In one bond the grantor, "with rather odious smugness", qualified his promise by adding that if his lord commanded anything "that becomes not a good Christian or the King's good subject" he would disobey without the eternal infamy which he acknowledged would otherwise follow the breaking of his bond. But this was a very late bond - in 1628, when the Kirk had been at work, infusing a new sanctimony into the robust old customs of Scotland. The "bond of manrent" was by then obsolescent: the Covenant was in sight.

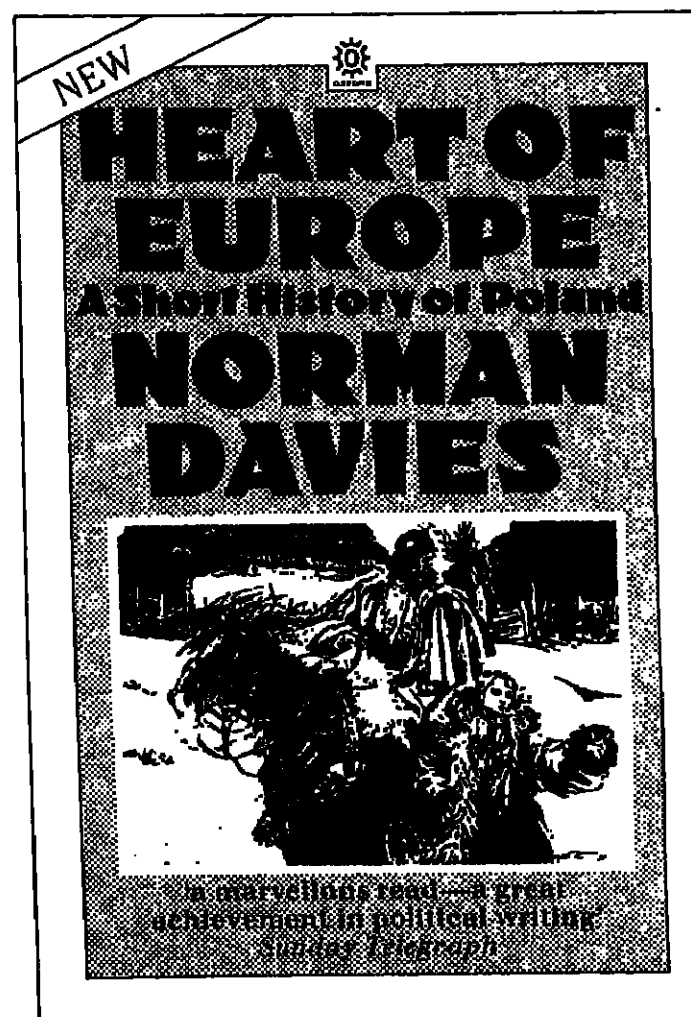
How did these "bonds of manrent" begin? Wormald shows that the word "manrent" itself was an archaism when it was revived in the fifteenth century to describe this new obligation which emerged out of homage. Its emergence in written form is itself surprising; for whereas a written title to land, to be held in perpetuity, is of obvious value, a promise of personal service, which included no tangible consideration, seems not to require such formality, especially at a time when literacy was rare. As Wormald remarks, it is surely "an astonishing fact that Scotland, an infinitely less well documented and less document-conscious society than England, has provided infinitely more evidence of its late-medieval lordship than England has done of its version, despite the fact that English indentures of retinue carried more material benefits than Scottish bonds of manrent and maintenance".

The explanation of such a paradox must be sought in objective circumstances: in "a particular period of racking uncertainty"; and Wormald looks for it in the time of troubles which followed the death, without heirs, of Alexander III in 1286 and the intrusion of Edward I into Scottish politics. It was then that the two earliest known bonds which were entirely concerned with mutual support were made. These were political bonds and both of them were motivated by the Bruce claim to the throne. Indeed, she suggests, if it had not been for the remarkable success of Robert Bruce as warrior and king, this Scottish version of "bastard feudalism" might well have begun its continuous history earlier. As it was, it was suspended till the weakness of the early Stewart monarchy, and the multiplication of over-mighty subjects overshadowing or claiming the throne, created the Scottish version of the English Wars of the Roses.

For by 1424, when James I returned to Scotland from his long English captivity, the habit of making personal bonds was sufficiently established for the King to ban them. He banned them very promptly, next year, in 1425. Any leagues between subjects were forbidden for the future and any already made were to be broken. Though expressed in general terms, the ban was almost certainly intended to be particular, directed against the machinations of the King's overmighty kinsmen the Dukes of Albany. In any case, it was completely ineffective: the habit of making "bonds of manrent" had by now taken off - Wormald's series begins in 1442, and by 1500 such bonds were becoming both copious and elaborate. After the death of James V at Solway Moss in 1542, successive regents - first the Earl of Arran, then Mary of Guise - again sought to ban "all bonds of manrent and maintenance". Once again the ban was completely ineffective; but once again it was not intended to be general. It was directed against particular rivals. It did not stop the regents themselves from making bonds as before.

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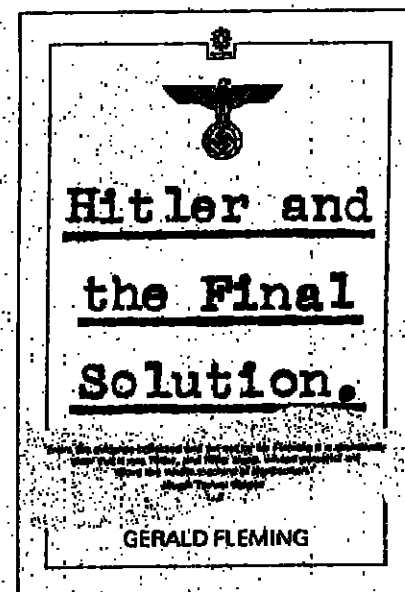
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confused period—the minority of Mary Stuart, the beginnings of Reformation, the contest between English and French parties in Scotland—the famous “cardinal of Scotland”, David Beaton, archbishop of St Andrews. In 1544 Mary of Guise was warned that the cardinal was manoeuvring to obtain a bond from Lord Gray “to be an enemy to Your Grace”, and that she had better move quickly to forestall him if she wished to be sure of the country north of Tay. Unfortunately the cardinal was quicker: four days later, Gray was in his bag, and Mary had to console herself by securing his enemy Lord Ruthven.

Although virtually none of cardinal Beaton's bonds of manrent survives, it is clear from contemporary accounts that he built up a vast alliance by this means: he maintained (an English emissary reported) “a great house of substantial men” . . . “such a house as was never holden in Scotland under a king”. In 1543 four bishops, six abbots, commendators and priors, six earls, ten lords and twenty lairds joined in a bond to him against Arran, and in 1546, according to John Knox, he thought himself, in his castle of St Andrews, “stout enough for all Scotland”, for “the most part of the nobility of Scotland had either given unto him their bonds of manrent or else were in confederacy and promised amity with him”. His confederacy did not in fact secure him: that same year he was murdered in his fortified “Babylon” of St Andrews and his body slung over the castle wall. Thereupon Mary of Guise was able to gather in the broken wreckage of his alliance. She got Lord Gray after all. And it must have been particularly agreeable to her, a few years later, to receive from the Earl of Huntly, who had previously been bound to the cardinal, a bond which promised, on securities and under penalty of £20,000, to obey her command and go to France within two months, “wind, weather, sickness and other lawful impossibilities and impediments” notwithstanding.

That was in 1555. Ten years later, in the crisis of the reign of Mary Stuart, some notable political bonds were made. One of them was the bond secured by her husband, Lord Darnley, for the murder of Riccio. The six noblemen who signed it were prudent enough to commit themselves only to innocent purposes: to press for the crown matrimonial for him, to persuade the Queen of England to show him favour, and to maintain the established — i.e. the Protestant — religion. But in his corresponding bond Darnley was dangerously, not to say recklessly explicit. Stating that the Queen's good nature was being abused by certain privy persons, and, in particular, by “a stranger Italian called David”, he declared his intention to punish these persons and, if necessary, kill them; and he guaranteed his protection and maintenance to those who would join him in this enterprise, which “may chance to be done in the presence of the Queen's Majesty or within her palace of Holyrood House”. After this, Darnley's public proclamation that he knew nothing of the conspiracy to murder Riccio was not very convincing.

Other remarkable political bonds of that turbulent period include the “Apsall's teven bond” of April 1567 which enabled Bothwell to carry off and marry the Queen, and the opprobrious bond whose signatories committed themselves to rescue her from him. Finally there was the bond signed on May 8, 1568, after Mary's escape from Lochleven Castle, by nine earls, nine bishops, twelve abbots and commendators, eighteen lords and ninety lairds who bound themselves to restore her to power. This was a greater “alliance” than even cardinal Beaton had been able to assemble, and it showed the kind of support that Mary could have kept if she had stayed in Scotland. Instead, she fled to England, leaving her supporters to fight for an absent monarch. It was a dreadful blunder. Not only did she cut herself off from her base, she also brought into England ideas which would be disastrous to her and her family. The famous Bond of Association to defend the life of Queen Elizabeth would create a pressure group demanding the death of Mary and, two generations later, the Puritan demand for an English “Convenant” would prepare the way for the death of her grandson, Charles I.

These political bonds were the spectacular summit of the system: Wormald's book is con-

cerned mainly with its local operation. The same magnates who signed political “bonds of friendship” among themselves owed their capacity to do so to the “bonds of manrent” which they had received, in their own territories, from lesser men — or rather, to the “affinities”, “connections”, “alliances”, to which such bonds had contributed. The nucleus of these affinities was kinship. Kinship was defined by “the surname” (which was sometimes assumed for convenience or protection) and extended by marriage. Beyond that nucleus, bonds of manrent, whose function was to strengthen the kindred by making other men honorary members of it, subject to the same obligations. Such alliances were not naturally stable: hence the desire to stabilize them by written documents such as were not needed (except for particular, limited purposes) within the true kindred.

The stability, being generally tied to lives, was often, like the lives themselves, very brief. Power is a magnet. Power to protect drew in clients. But the accidental loss of that power could reverse the process. Thus in 1590, when the Earl of Huntly, the great magnate of the



North, weakened himself by dabbling with Spain, his rival, the Earl of Moray, was able to detach from his alliance the Mackintoshes of Dunnichen and the Grants of Freuchie; whereupon a whole group of local chieftains joined in a bond of mutual assistance with Moray as the more powerful lord. However, fear is also a magnet, and can help to redress the balance. So Huntly was able to secure new bonds from the enemies and rivals of Moray's new allies. Thereupon the deserters, in alarm, returned and the old power was restored. Three months later it triumphed: Moray was murdered, his castle of Donibristle burnt, his clientele, like that of cardinal Beaton before him, dissolved and Huntly “settled down to his former position of unrivalled supremacy in the North”.

Similarly the Campbells, Earls of Argyll, had a bad patch in the mid-sixteenth century owing to the “dithering” of the fourth Earl. Fortunately he was an exception in his dynasty: his two sons, who ruled successively from 1558 to 1584, restored the position. The bonds made to them are “unusually detailed documents” which “make impressive reading” — Wormald calendars twenty-six of them: they show “not two earls exercising absolute authority in Argyll, but rather two earls who were personally able and tough enough to control what was in effect a pack of snarling dogs, and who means themselves when they thought it necessary”. The snarling dogs broke out of the kennel on the death of the second of these two formidable earls, whose heir was a minor; but when he grew up, he brought them to heel again, and lived to exercise, for many years,

an overpowering influence in the affairs of the Highlands and Isles. It was an influence which was to last and, in spite of political interruptions, to become a national force in the next century.

It was not only great magnates like Huntly and Argyll who extended their local power through bonds of manrent. A remarkable collection of such bonds was made by the family of Campbell of Glenorchy, mere lairds. One of the family — Duncan, the seventh laird — collected “the staggering total of 116”, more than had been obtained by either Huntly or Argyll throughout the whole period when the making of bonds was common. These seem to be notarial copies, in Scots, of promises made verbally in Gaelic. Whatever their purpose, they clearly show a forward “expansionist” policy within the Campbell “surname”. This Duncan Campbell, who was laird for nearly half a century, was not a mere highlander: he travelled abroad, acquired lands in Perthshire, was a great builder, estate manager, horse-breeder; but the length to which he and his family went in this method of asserting strength in the Highlands was unique. His successors would consolidate their position, becoming Earls of Breadalbane, and acquire lasting fame by their “extirpation”, in 1692, of the Macdonalds of Glencoe.

The bonds given to great lords were mainly by lesser lords or lairds who could bring in forty to a hundred or even 200 men. Those given to the Campbells of Glenorchy seem to be from lesser men who undertake, with their families and occasionally a few friends, to pay the Highland tribute of “calps” and to refuse allegiance to the dreadful MacGregors (whom the Campbells would afterwards help James VI to “extirpate”). But bonds were also granted by burghs, even royal burghs, and by individual burgesses within burghs. Nairn, in 1472, entered into an indenture of maintenance with Hugh Fraser of Lovat, and Banff and Cullen were Olgivy fiefs. Some burghs gave to their patrons the right to nominate one of their bailies and other officers, as Renfrew did to the Earl of Argyll in 1580. The Hamiltons and Douglasses “kicked the provostship of Edinburgh between them” for a decade before 1520, when the Hamiltons cornered it. In 1463 the royal burgh of Aberdeen gave a bond of manrent to the Earl of Huntly, in return for maintenance. Cautiously, it made its bond valid for only ten years. In fact the dependence lasted, not without some friction, for over a century. The Earls dominated the burgh through their allies, the Menzies of Pitfodells, who became permanent provosts. In 1590 the burgh complained of this, both to the Privy Council and to the Convention of Royal Burghs. It claimed that it had been enthralled to one family as if it was a mere burgh of barony, its provostship unlawfully usurped by the race of Menzies for the last eighty years. 1590 was, as we have seen, a critical year for Huntly, and it was then that Aberdeen emancipated itself from the domination of the Menzies family.

Such, in general, was the system of clientage by means of bonds of manrent. How far, we may ask, was it responsible, as so many historians of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries maintained, for the anarchy which they regarded as typical of independent Scotland? It is difficult to deny that such a system provided the means of “feuding”, and that such feuding was intensified in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by the frequent minorities, and occasional incapacity, of the Scottish Crown. But apart from these conditions, was the system, in itself, a cause of anarchy? Wormald looks on the positive side of the system. For although it presupposed a context of violence it also provided a mechanism to control that violence. Bonds of manrent, she argues, by extending kinship, brought men into a system of internal, local justice, the justice of the family, which, though different from central royal justice, was not necessarily worse; and anyway, the organs of such central, royal justice were not yet effective in Scotland.

In particular, the system entailed a mechanism for reconciliation. If there was vengeance, there was also arbitration. Bonds of manrent required that “good counsel” be given. Sometimes they specified the occasion for such counsel — e.g. marriage. Sometimes they named arbitrators of disputes, and such arbitration could

be enforced: “It was no light matter when, like the Earls of Angus and Argyll in 1546, the Earl of Montrose, Lord Fleming and Lord Livingstone in 1586, threatened dependence who would not abide by their decision with withdrawal of their protection”. To emphasize their acceptance of such decisions, officials were sometimes subjected to humiliating public ceremonies; which, in a culture of honour and shame, can be very effective.

Of course this private, tribal justice, with formulae of settlement, was a negotiation of public, impartial justice; but in the circumstances of the time, Wormald suggests, it may have proved more salutary, and less painful, than confrontation in court. Possibly, possibly not . . . Anyway, she adds, confrontation in court did not necessarily lead to more impartial justice, for Scottish bonds of manrent, the English “livery and maintenance”, were also a means of coercing the court; and she quotes several letters to illustrate this. When a member of Dunbar was cited before a court for murder, John Dunbar of Mochrum “thought it very necessary”, as he wrote, to turn up unaided “accompanied at the same day with my long friends”, and so he summoned them all, including a future senator of the College of Justice, to come, with their servants, in such masses as they would desire him, his friends and servants to do for them in like case. As Wormald remarks, “there is an engaging bluntness about these letters” which suggests “that the attempts to influence judges and the ones were accepted as a familiar feature of society”. There is indeed; and an engaging circling about the argument. The high point of self-interference with formal justice was reached when Bothwell's armed supporters prevented his trial for the murder of Darnley by so terrorizing the accuser, the Earl of Lennox, that he did not dare to appear to pursue the action. Such intimidation had been forbidden by law in 1536, but who cared for the law now? James VI was reduced to sending a plaintive appeal to Lord Hamilton not to bring more than his ordinary train to the law court, “since it is an ill example to break the law both made in Parliament and renewed by proclamation”.

James VI had good reason to dislike the noble anarchy of his time. He condemned the “feuding”, of which he and his house had often been the victim — condemned it by law in 1584 and in his book *Basiliikon Doron* in 1599, but he made use of it himself when it served the cause of peace or his own personal purpose. After all, he must have appreciated the immense bond by which, in 1599, the Scottish nobility, including some recent rebels, promised to support his claim to the English throne; and how could he have “extirpated” the MacGregors except by exploiting the feud between them and the Campbells? His attitude was ambivalent, and in some ways he was more conservative (or perhaps more respectful towards present reality) than his legally minded, non-noble, or newly ennobled councillors. He did not, like James I or his mother's regents (whatever their motives), forbid bonds of manrent. Nevertheless, in his reign, they virtually ceased. Their cessation, from about 1600, is something of a mystery. Perhaps, as Wormald suggests, it was simply a by-product of a larger change: on one hand, the extension of public law by the new *noblesse de robe* in Scotland; on the other, the removal of the king to England and his desire to bring the two countries under the same system. In other words, central justice was at last being overtaken by central law, and not only the justice of the Crown but also, at a lower level, seducing the lairds away from their dependence on the magnates, of the family. Even so, the suddenness of the cessation is remarkable, and since tribal rivalries did not cease, but would be reactivated under Charles I, when the central power, once again, broke down, we are left asking new questions about perhaps the best ending for a work of scholarship such as this.

This is a stimulating study of an important subject in Scottish history. Its interest and significance extend far beyond its topic to achievement. Dr Wormald is to be congratulated on it. At the same time let us commend her publishers, who by a stream of excellent publications in recent years have shown themselves active patrons of a valuable Scottish/historical studies.

John Steane

WILLIAM R. MORAN
Nellie Melba: A contemporary review
491pp. Greenwood. £45.
0313 28936

Before the farewells came the au revoir. One of these, a concert at the Albert Hall in 1921, was proclaimed by the Northcliffe Press to be “the musical event of the year”, and at the same time news circulated that retirement could be imminent: Dame Nellie Melba was to return to Australia to teach. To the first part of this proposition the *Musical Times* reconciled itself without too much difficulty. “The Diva to go home”, they quoted. “By all means. Why not? As the Diva has melodiously declared (not too often), there's no place like it. The other half — ‘And teach a hundred girls’ — was a different matter. ‘If the Diva can give these hundred girls her own beautiful voice, well and good, but for heaven's sake let a musician be called in to attend to the repertoire. We cannot lightly face the prospect of a hundred debutantes let loose on us a year hence full to the epiglottis with Minnetonkas, Jewel Songs and Home sweet homes.’

The point, flippantly made, was seriously meant. In the view of many people concerned with the cause of music, celebrity singers,

Melba pre-eminent among them, made a contribution that was not merely unhelpful but in some ways distinctly inimical. They had a vast following, held enormous power and could have used it to lead their audiences to a broader musical interest and a deeper kind of enjoyment. By way of contrast, the *Musical Times* recalled that Jenny Lind had played a part in the Bach revival, singing a duet from the B minor Mass: “Imagine our Tetractis and Melbas showing enthusiasm over such a matter.” What was offered to the public instead, as representing the highest reaches of art, were the “Jewel Song” from *Faust* and “Comin' through the rye”.

Such a view of Melba and her significance in the wider world of music is one that finds no expression in this book. The subject of Melba as a musician is briefly touched on by Landon Ronald, who says that at one time he tried in vain to introduce her to the songs of Schubert and Brahms. She did indeed add a few by Debussy and Duparc to her concert programmes; but trifles. “Three green bonnets”, “By the waters of Minnetonka” and so forth, had a totally disproportionate place, while from Handel and Mozart she simply sang the same two or three arias over and over again. There is an interesting remark by Herman Klein that when she appeared in something less familiar, such as Goring-Thomas's *Esmeralda*, “the incandescence would be missing”. Her continued devotion to Verdi's *Otello* and her



Melba in the 1890s

early advocacy of Puccini's *La Bohème* can be put in balance against that. Yet even here, and in the heartland of the *bel canto* operas, there was a narrowness: musically such a small area, one feels, in which to have made such a sup-

reme and world-wide reputation.

In response to that, of course, one might remark that, within its own terms, the achievement becomes all the more remarkable. And “remarkable” is a pale, thin-lipped word to apply to a career like Melba's. As this “contemporary review” traces its path, it takes us to those times when the opera houses were ablaze with diamonds and on special nights heavy with the scent of roses; when the Tsar, the English aristocracy, the millionaires of New York in the grip of its opera-mania paid homage to the stars; when urchins outside the great concert-hall would strain their ears to catch the sound of a few notes from within; when a Parisian flower-seller would react with adoration to the magic words “Je suis Melba”. The well-known tributes of Mary Garden, W. J. Henderson and G. B. Shaw are here (Shaw who first cursed the woman because he didn't like what she was doing yet could find no fault to put his finger on, and who later heard her “transfigured, reawakened” and singing with such unflinching accuracy of intonation that he felt it was only when Melba sang that you realized how rare it was to hear anyone singing well and truly on pitch).

A good survey of the career by Barbara and Findlay Mackenzie opens the collection of essays and memoirs; from these and other Australians it also becomes clear how much the musical life of Melba's native country owed to her. Glimpses of her teaching, her generosity and her vigour, stirring up whatever part of her profession she became involved in, remain in the mind as perhaps the most vivid and lasting impressions from the book. When the touts tried to buy up and resell tickets for a concert that she had intended as a chance for people who couldn't normally afford it to hear her, she stationed herself at the sales-point and physically prevented her intentions being thwarted. Her energy was immense, illustrated in sketches by Beverly Nichols, who is still an indispensable source of insight into Melba. He, too, provides part of this “contemporary review”. The editor, William Moran, co-ordinates and makes several other contributions, including the discography, which is a model of its kind. His essays on Melba's voice, principally concerned with establishing how “big” it was and how suited to the heavier roles she undertook, is probably the best chapter in the book. It draws on a wide variety of contemporary sources, balances them carefully and becomes a valuable adjunct to our own primary source, the gramophone records. Unfortunately, it is only four pages long. I wish Mr Moran had written this book himself: had used the source material he provides here and a whole lot more that is available, and had handled it as he does, the material brought together in that chapter.

Seen and not seen

Colin Matthews

PATRICIA HOWARD (Editor)
Benjamin Britten: “The Turn of the Screw”
64pp. Cambridge University Press. £22.50
(paperback, £7.95).
0521 23923

Early on in their collaboration, Britten and his librettist Myfanwy Piper decided that the ghosts in *The Turn of the Screw* would sing, and sing words: there would be no “nice, anonymous, supernatural humming or groaning”. Thus at the outset a major area of ambiguity was removed from the drama, and the relationships between Quint and Miss Jessel and Miles and Flora were given definition. In Henry James's story, of course, the ghosts do not speak, nor is there any indisputable evidence that anyone but the governess sees them. Indeed so scrupulous is James to avoid incriminating the children directly that it is hard to see why the story was ever accepted purely at face value, as if it were a simple story of malevolent haunting.

But the opera follows, as operas do, and should, a more straightforward course. Compare the climactic “night scene” in Act One of the opera with its source: Quint and Miss Jessel are seen and heard by the audience (and the governess) to be communicating directly with the children (their dreamlike response is a masterly touch in the libretto). In James, the governess discovers Flora looking out of the window. Sure that she is communing with Miss Jessel, she rushes to a lower room, from whose window she sees instead Miles, looking up — at Quint, she supposes. No words are spoken. Miles's explanation the next day is plausible: he had arranged that Flora should look out of the window (at him) in order to tease the governess — to prove that he can be bad if he wishes (an understandable response to the governess's sugary over-protectiveness). James leaves the interpretation of the event open: one of the many instances which have caused the story to become a *locus classicus* of literary investigation.

Patricia Howard's study, the eighth in the Cambridge Opera Handbook series, further explores the cause of ambiguity. Caught up in the conflicting mesh of interpretation (admirably expounded by Vivien Jones in the opening chapter) she is never able to leave it long enough to deal adequately with the musical complexity of the work. Her discussion of the libretto, detailed and often rewarding, is dominated by a seeming desire to emphasize an ambivalence which is only tangential to the drama. In her description of the “night scene”, she presents

both sides of the case — though surprisingly claiming that the scene is closely modelled on James — yet comes down firmly against the libretto with the assertion that the events are no more than “a projection of the governess's delusions”.

No other opera of Britten's is so highly organized, which makes it all the more unfortunate that we are almost half-way through the book before serious consideration of the music begins. Patricia Howard's structural analysis of the whole work only scratches the surface, and in the detailed critique of Act Two, Scene Eight which follows, she is forced to begin again and go into crucial detail which should already have been covered. Fortunately the musical section begins with the best part of the book, John Evans's chronological analysis of Britten's sketches. But it's a tantalizing glimpse, since nine pages and four music examples (why no manuscript facsimiles?) are hardly adequate.

Christopher Palmer, on the orchestration — “the colour of the music” — mixes compelling insight into the extraordinary sound-world that

Britten creates from a mere twelve players, with a similar bias to Patricia Howard's. His premiss is that the work's central concern is with the latent (or actual) homosexual relationship between Miles and Quint. Thus Quint's music is exotic and desirable, like Taddzio's in *Death in Venice*, and Palmer similarly derives it from Balinese gamelan. But there is no element of heterophony in the score — the one aspect of gamelan that Britten had already appropriated through playing piano transcriptions, and he did not hear Balinese music for the first time until several years after *Turn of the Screw*. Quint's music is undeniably strange, pentatonic — quasi-oriental if you will — but the sound of Bartók's “night music” is surely as seminal as the sound of music Britten had not yet heard.

There are photographs from eight productions (including the first), and an account of critical reactions and a summary of producers' “options” round the volume off. But with no real sense of conclusion: the book never quite comes to grips with its subject. The screw has too many missing threads.

Selected Works Volume V: Poetry and Experience Wilhelm Dilthey

Edited, with an Introduction, by Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi

“Princeton's ambitious Dilthey project is of the greatest historical and theoretical interest and the present volume — on poetry and experience — is the very heart of the undertaking and of Dilthey's own life work. Contemporary interest in the German tradition (from Heidegger to the Frankfurt School) cannot but be illuminated and enlightened by a return to this, one of its principal sources.”

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Anne Haverty

NAYANTARA SAHGAL
Plans for Departure
216pp. Heinemann. £9.95.
0434 666114

Nayantara Sahgal's seventh novel is the story of a young woman's rendezvous with India at a time (1914) when the status of both women and India was on the brink of change. It's a story that has come to have a certain predictability – the European confronted with the intensity and mystery of India also confronts some hitherto unconscious yearning in herself.

The power struggle in Europe is about to break out into a cataclysm, Indian nationalist aspirations are taking on a revolutionary character and tremors reach the remote hill-station of Himapur, along with Anna Hansen. She comes fresh from London, where Emily Davidson (who threw herself under the King's horse) has been buried with elegiac pomp by thousands of women mourners, and is equipped with the simple indomitable independence we associate with the New Woman of that era.

Anna is splendid. She walks in the hills, taking unfrequented paths, and returns with wind-bright cheeks to cook Danish fricadella for the dignified Indian botanist to whom she is an enthusiastic amanuensis. Being Danish, citizen of a country whose virtue is its unimportance and self-containment, Anna can take

tea in the back room of Madhav Rao, the village pharmacist and photographer, and talk about the release from prison of the nationalist Tilak and Tilak's writings. The Raj is represented in Himapur by the Crofts, with their crude missionary zeal, and by Henry Brewster, the District Magistrate, who is disaffected, uncommitted to the "ideology of rule". Anna is half-engaged to a diplomat in London; Henry has, elsewhere, a beautiful wife who seems to have left him – he is pallid and distracted. Each recognizes, however, that they are like souls, solitary figures of the nascent twentieth century, aloof from the business of empire-maintenance and the old certainties of justice and morality.

Here, the plot falls flat. Imaginative Anna senses a mystery concerning Henry's lost wife. Mists lie in pockets on the ground and swirl invitingly among the trees, mountain ledges give way, the rain drums insistently. But there is no dénouement. Anna flees from Himapur, from Henry and from whatever she might have learned. So we must follow her to London, even unto the third generation, in which her half-Indian grandchild represents some sort of happier alliance between East and West in the present day.

Sahgal writes with assurance, skill and humour. She has a contagious interest in the more ebullient aspects of twentieth-century history, but fails to encompass its grimness. Anna's story begins with the romance of optimism and idealism, but that it should fade into a comforting family saga is unsatisfying.

Organizing the organism

Colin Greenland

FREDERICK POHL
Pohlstars
203pp. Gollancz. £8.95.
0575 037180

The topics of Frederick Pohl's science fiction are politics and ecology: organization and the organism. For fifty years his writing has been lucid, sensitive and witty. His most recent novels have included several sequels to and revisions of earlier successes – not the most direct way for a satirist to work. In *Pohlstars* he approaches the task of collecting his later short stories in a similarly ruminative fashion, calling up the authors of the past: this one was inspired by recollections of Cordwainer Smith; that arose out of collaboration with Jack Williamson; a third was written on the very typewriter which once clattered out the lurid space romances of E. E. "Doc" Smith. Of other inclusions Pohl records only the editors who commissioned them, or the publications for which they were designed.

"The Sweet, Sad Queen of the Grazing Isles", the first story here, a glum novella about

ecologically-benign innovation corrupted by greed, is ostensibly set in an overpopulated future, but peopled throughout by stereotypes from the popular fiction of Pohl's youth: heartless gangsters, bluff sailors, nice girls and vamps. Its fatalistic, reactionary narrator goes unexamined. The second story, "High Test", rehearses the kind of xenophobic cliché the young Pohl's magazines routinely rejected.

Gratifyingly, all nine of the other stories show Pohl still doing what he has always done best, fabricating absurd systems and predicaments, chilling and comic by turns, around characters observed with sympathy even if they are psychotic murderers, like Wayne Golden in "We Purchased People", or embryonic tyrants, like Chandlie in "Growing Up in Edge City". Two stories, "Spending a Day at the Lottery Fair" and "The Way It Was", adumbrate futures when the unemployed will eagerly participate in capitalism by gambling with their lives or parts of their bodies. Aliens are permitted to take over individual human beings in "We Purchased People" and "Enjoy, Enjoy", two very different stories about the limits to desire and its consummation: the tropes of science fiction reveal most when they are most transparent.

Short histories

Savkar Altinel

SHEELAGH KELLY
A Long Way from Heaven
539pp. Century. £9.95.
07126 10154

Driven out of Ireland by the potato famine, Patrick Feeney and his young wife make their way, first to Liverpool and then to York, where she soon dies, leaving him to battle alone with poverty and prejudice. This he does with more valour than success, falling in love with and marrying a passionate Englishwoman called Thomasin and setting up his own building business before financial difficulties force him to become a labourer once again. Sheelagh Kelly's novel is essentially episodic, but obviously based on solid research and vividly written.

SUSAN KAY

Legacy
648pp. Bodley Head. £9.95.
0370 308743

Elizabeth I seen more as a woman than as a

monarch. Without actually saying as much, Susan Kay's novel, winner of both the Georgette Heyer and Betty Trask Prizes last year, suggests that the queen's strong personality, which enabled her to attract and dominate men as diverse as Thomas Seymour and Robert Dudley, William Cecil and the Earl of Essex, was the result of her being possessed by the spirit of her mother Anne Boleyn after the latter's execution. Sadly, the book itself is not "possessive" in the way of truly riveting fiction, but it is ably constructed and written.

GREG MATTHEWS
Heart of the Country
532pp. Macmillan. £9.95.
0333 353471

Half-Indian and a hunchback, young Joe Cohen tries to solve his problems by running away to the Wild West where, in the course of a varied career as woodcutter, bouncer in a brothel and buffalo hunter, he only finds other physically or emotionally maimed mutants desperately searching for a new life. This is an ambitious book, very well written in parts and with a number of memorable characters, but

Syphilitic Septimus

Hanif Kureishi

KIKKI DUCORNET
Entering Fire
160pp. Chatto and Windus. £9.95 (paperback, £3.95).
07011 29492

Early in *Entering Fire*, Septimus de Bergerac's father Lamprias flees Proustian Paris, leaving behind his dwarfish syphilitic son, insane Chinese concubine and frigid wife (afraid of "the very gears which set the wheels of procreation in motion"), for the jungles and bordellos of South America. It is not difficult to see why. For there, in steamy forests, according to Rikki Ducornet's drenched, exotic images, perfumed smiles and reeking prose, the women usually have black or red eyes; one has blue nipples, and another is smeared with honey and eaten alive by ants.

Not that it is always duller at home. In Paris, Septimus the son reads books bound in human flesh, featuring embossed rosebuds made from human nipples. (Still, you can't always tell a book by its cover.) When not enjoying literature, the boy likes to be kicked in the chest by prostitutes. And only once, unfortunately, he has the pleasure of attending, with his beloved and deserted mother, the execution of his hated and beautiful brother. Cut-off heads came expensive then, but Septimus pays through the nose for it. Of course: "a severed head is forever".

Meanwhile, as the father counts over a hundred species of mosquito in Brazil and penetrates the world's clefts for the unknown for science and for knowledge of the dream of life, the son's hatred of the liberal lapses and anything alien increases.

The spiffy young men of the SS are come by Septimus; now among the French play Cavaliers of Superior Humanity, that, in all modesty, he resembles the Führer. And the only other loving moment for him occurs when he is sitting on Pétain's bed, helping the old man to sleep with compliant, out jazz-bands, Negroid Fever, and yams had not been for grandfather's ruin, Luisa Sanchez, the narrator, might not have been a bastard or, ultimately, a servant. Sanchez is destroyed by his landlord, Antonio de la Cueva; later, de la Cueva's son seduces Sanchez's impoverished daughter, a servant at his mother's house. The product of so much ruin on the one hand and exploitation on the other, Luisa is a schematic, strained and exaggerated pursuit of unreality in a period of history when surely reality itself was sufficiently changed to be interesting. Magical realism, with its role for the bizarre, the absurd and the sub-American, is an advance in ambition on the coming-on-campus novel; but its refusal to deal with the texture of ordinary life as it stops can, in lesser writers, reduce its freedom to frantic fireworks, cleverness so clever as strangeness so strange that, as with *Entering Fire*, in the scramble to include everything, most things are left out.

An alternative America

John Clute

THOMAS BERGER
Nowhere
190pp. Methuen. £9.50.
0413 598705

Nowhere in his new novel does Thomas Berger mention *Erewhon*, but the spirit of Samuel Butler's astringent vision of 1872 informs every page of this latest attempt at the writing of Utopia. For a number of reasons it may be the hardest type of fiction to write well; but unfortunately, because Berger has no point to make, *Nowhere* reads as slapdash and facetious, and fatally lacks the sustained (if at times manic) cognition that drives the genuinely successful Utopian novel.

Russel Wron, the seedy, incompetent wisecrack private eye from Berger's *Who Is Teddy Villanova?* (1977), actively dislikes modern New York, but has no inkling why America may have come to seem less than paradisaic. A bomb scare drives him into the arms of a government agency seeking to gain information about Saint Sebastian, the Ruritman homeland of the bombers. Wron will be

the visitor to Utopia. Knocked unconscious, he soon finds himself landing in the topsy-turvy principality.

As with *Erewhon*, most things are reversed. Blondes, rather than Blacks, are persecuted; it is illegal to be out of debt, and so forth. During the course of one long dream-like day, Wron has lunch with the obese prince, visits the comic guild of writers and the offices of government (next door to the loo), and becomes involved in the farce of a revolution. He is beaten up frequently, but recovers with enormous speed. Finally he escapes Saint Sebastian's prop plane piloted by the deposed prince, his plane crashes, and he awakens. Lo, it was a dream.

This will not do. Many Utopias, or anti-Utopias, some of them of a punitive vision, have been couched as dream visions; others depict worlds of a terrifying onerous violence, though their protagonists are real enough, and trapped in the nightmare. But *Nowhere*, being a dream vision of a world whose rules have already been set, is a farce. It is a farce, and its reader with no argument to grasp, and no need to remember.

Over a career now entering its fourth decade, Berger has more than once created worlds that represent some alternative to a beastly present. In *The Feud*, his last novel, for example, the alternative human community is an Arcadian vision of small-town America, c.1935. When human nature begins to glow through this idyllic scene, chaos results; violently and poignantly. But *Nowhere* provides no venue where human beings can be loved or pitied. As an alternative world, Saint Sebastian is hell. One can only hope that Berger will not stop here in his search for a human community he can describe without destroying.

ALAN HUNTER
The Chelsea Ghost
176pp. Constable. £6.95.
009 4666407

When photographer Siggy Fazakerly finds the corpse of his favourite model lying on a couch in his King's Road studio with her head bashed in, he sensibly rings up his friend Superintendent Gently before informing the local police. Gently, most Malignant of Detectives, unofficially eases himself into the case, and uncovers some odd Chelsea connections before cracking the case. Another masterly, professionally piece of work from the Hunter, with an interesting, detailed and centre of its plot.

Servitude and the freedom to observe

Linda Taylor

PAULA FOX
A Servant's Tale
321pp. Virago. £9.95 (paperback, £3.95).
08008 7074

A novel that begins with the words, "Ruined Ruined", followed by the description of a grandfather's tragic last days, might be expected to display some passionate bleakness. The words, and the story of Isidro Sanchez, do not provide a prologue for the life that follows: if it had not been for grandfather's ruin, Luisa Sanchez, the narrator, might not have been a bastard or, ultimately, a servant. Sanchez is destroyed by his landlord, Antonio de la Cueva; later, de la Cueva's son seduces Sanchez's impoverished daughter, a servant at his mother's house. The product of so much ruin on the one hand and exploitation on the other, Luisa is keenly aware of her position. Passionate bleakness, though, has devolved, in her, into melancholia, "Latin dejection with its whittling-down irony". In place of the "Ruined", she can only manage a desperate "Fuck you" in reply to a patronizing husband. Unlike her grandfather who died on the Estramadura Swamp in the Hispanic Caribbean island of San Pedro, Luisa's "tragedy" is muted: she endures the self-effacing drudgery of a servant's life in New York City.

In this last sense, Luisa's "tale" might be that of countless low-status brown-skinned women (women, for that matter) who emigrated to the United States in the last fifty or sixty years, fleeing from revolutions and/or poverty. Luisa's particular statelessness, however, stems from the social discrepancy between her parents. The de la Cuevas are a modern version of the conquistadors (the fictional island of San Pedro has remained a base for Spanish

colonialism until the left-wing coup which prompts Luisa's Papá to take herself and her Mamá to America). The Sanchezes, though, are mulattos: "Where did my grandfather come from?" Luisa asks her Nana; "Where we all come from," she replied, "Seville and Africa." Luisa, then, is almost white, but with a trace of the negro, and it is that trace, as her Nana tries to tell her, that informs both white and black opinion, particularly once she gets to the United States. The blacks see her as white; the whites see her as, at best, inferior ("My little Spanish maid") and, at worst, as a Negro; the liberals see her as the victim of "Yankee exploitation" (but "The plantation was owned by a Spanish lady," I said.). "Are you Spanish?" asks a lustful employer. "I am and I'm not", Luisa replies.

Curiously, in fact, in the country where she confirms her lack of status by becoming a servant, Luisa (once her father marries her mother) is a citizen (her de la Cueva grandfather signed the relevant papers years before). Luisa's attraction to servitude is employed as a measure of her perverse naïveté: The life was drawn. Ellen (her black friend) and Thad (Ellen's brother) – and even my father in his disaffected and belittling fashion – on one side, I, on the other. They wanted to drag me across the line into a life that required an effort I was unable, or unwilling, to make. To me, being a servant promised a kind of freedom.

Paula Fox is not trying to produce, simply, a feminist heroine, or one who is tragically bound by her dead roots. Both issues in the novel are relevant only in that they are part of a wider revelation of human barbarity, or the way in which people's acquisitiveness, ambition, politics and individuality can be expressed to the detriment of others. As a servant, Luisa is "free" to observe, and suffer, the proud disregard for others that her employees exotically and eccentrically display.

Spells from the seed-bed

Gerald Mangan

ALAN V. HEWAT
Lady's Time
330pp. Heinemann. £10.95.
0413 28006

An unusually graceful cover illustration, of piano keys undulating in water, captures some of the style of this first novel in its opening images. One snowy morning in New England in 1916, a piano teacher known in the village as "Lady" Winslow is amusing herself with some familiar ragtime, when her fingers stray involuntarily into a long-forgotten theme. Painful memories rise to the surface, in the same instant that her son Leon, idling on his way to school, falls through the ice into the frozen lake. The doctor later despairs of him, but Lady responds with the eerie calm of a sleepwalker, performs a ritual with herbs and roots, and returns to the piano at the moment of his death.

As soon as she touched the keys, she heard a low, dwelling voice say "Bring 'em in from the alley now, child, and let 'em roll," and she could smell the spices and the smoke and the river air of New Orleans. She started to play the music she had left behind in time the blues of her own life, that led her on as she continued her search in time, looking for her baby, her Leon.

When the voice of Leon picks up the narrative, reminiscing in his old age, we realize that this voodoo resurrection has worked, and that we are in a region of magical realism not often explored by white North American novelists. In this introspective community of down-trodden WASP farmers, where even the barber-shop gossip pays some of the respect due to her dignity, Lady has for long been passing for white, and as a widow. But her origins are dark in more than one sense, and the long centre-piece of the novel is an account of her well-concealed past as Alice Beaudette, the pale and rather fey daughter of a coloured washer-woman in Storyville.

In a haunted world of whores and madams, conjure-women and "spasm-bands", violent shadows and unquiet graves, the darkest presence is at the heart of the story. A Creole

In the beginning (and in the style of the *Bildungsroman*, this novel begins at the beginning) Luisa worships her wise Nana, the storyteller, and is perplexed by the warring capriciousness of her impoverished silly Mamá and her rich dilettante Papá. From this intimate view of her relatives' quality of life, Luisa has a base from which to perceive the often cruel stupidities of many of her employers: Mrs. Justen's exclusive attachment to stray cats; Mrs. Burgess's seduction of Luisa's son, Charlie; Mr. Mortimer's seduction of Luisa; and Tom Greer's (Luisa's husband's) largely unjustified disaffection with his wife.

It would be wrong, however, to suggest that Luisa's position in relation to these people conveys a sense of moral outrage. They are grotesque because people often are; Luisa, as servant, has condemned herself to a position of non-involvement and non-judgment. Freedom, in any real sense, only comes to her when she inherits several thousand dollars from her only truly kind employer, a Mr. Clare.

Constant caprice

Neville Shack

STEFAN THEMERSON
The Mystery of the Sardine
194pp. Faber. £9.95.
0571 137407

Do not be misled by the epigraph to this novel, which advises that axioms, politics and poetry are mortal, while good manners are immortal. This particular axiom itself represents yet another example of whimsy in a book whose opinions on human behaviour should never be taken more seriously than they deserve. Meaning somehow counts for less than the meaning of meaning; blasts of epistemology put doubting intellects in their place. The jokes are funny, with a kind of oblique ribbing contained in the discourse. Entertainment, perhaps, at the expense of those who are educated above their intelligence.

One clear keynote throughout is capriciousness – mostly the author's as he lays it on for his characters' cameo turns. Many of them, weird and wacky, seem to have a flair for bemusement in action and speech. They are figures in a constantly shifting scenario, neither naturalistic nor typical of much beyond themselves. These people who come and go, often in search of clues, serve only the fickle ends of the narrative. They are mannequins, walking constructs in the mode of Peter Greenaway's cinematic inventions; the tableaux are highly synthetic, despite real settings and occasionally believable situations.

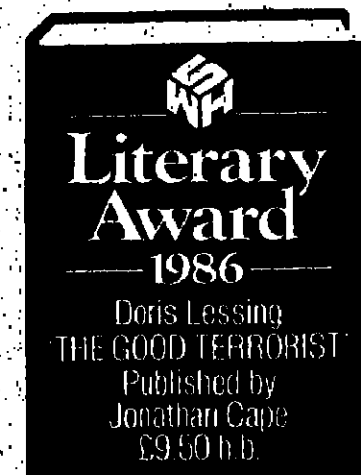
The plot of this shaggy sardine story is broadly equal to the sum of its many bizarre parts. New leads towards a solution of the mystery are curtailed; old, sometimes sterile gambits are reworked. A black poodle has carried a bomb which explodes, killing an innocent

A *Servant's Tale* is a sombre one, full of striking observations (Luisa notices how her employers are often psychologically dependent on her presence, for instance) and memorable truth-telling prose. The more the character of Luisa is obscured by her servant's disguise, the more she gains the strength of knowing perseverance. The poignancy of this long book is real enough, but some of the force of its sadness is reduced by the narrator's flat tones and the necessarily dreary nature of her life. The novel cries out for a third-person voice: if Paula Fox had employed one she might have been able to laugh a little at her heroine while revealing her sensibilities and the peculiar grotesqueness of her world. In its depiction of human behaviour (if not exactly manners), however, *A Servant's Tale* lacks that kind of complex irony. Luisa's character and life are depressing just because she is heroically ordinary; the fact that she does not die on the Estramadura Swamp is not wholly in her favour.

seeker after the knowledge of the colour of a dead writer's eyes. At first, the motives for this outrage at the home of a lecturer, Chesterton-Brown, seem obscure. After a police inquiry and some strange behaviour on the part of a neighbouring ambassador's butler, the memory of the bombing is overlaid by other phenomena, metaphysical oddities in the minds of the actors. An absurd game of consequences spins itself out, actions and ideas subsumed in one giant improvisation.

In Majorca, Chesterton-Brown meets a likeable boy who claims to love but not like his daughter, Emma. The boy is abnormal in his own way: a heart on the right side of his chest, an overwrought taste for differential calculus and a grudge against Euclid. After holding forth, he drowns in the sea. No matter. Every incident brings another one to the fore; no party is redundant when he or she summons another one onto the stage, complete with a potted history of his or her earlier life and an urge to take up the burden of the story with a minimal quantity of conventional motivation. So the boy's mother feels impelled to take the basket containing his ashes to Poland, where his father was born, thus opening up a new front in the narrative, another tangential tease. This, in turn, involves the most fascinating member of the cast, Lady Cooper, intrepid, composed and never less than rigorously inquiring: a true model of good manners and old-fashioned English charm.

The novel has its attractions as well as frustrations. There is a capacity to surprise, both through its transitions and its many *non sequiturs*. Circumstances might be collapsed and new ones substituted at random. On the other hand, passages can easily be swamped by boring textbook detail, in which the degree of irony is variable. Overall, the licence to be far-fetched ensures a gusto and makes light of everything, even when it exasperates.



For the most outstanding contribution to English Literature in a book published in 1985.

WHSMITH

Searching for ethical significance

Jonathan Lear

TED HONDERICH (Editor)
 Morality and Objectivity: A tribute to
 J. L. Mackie
 228pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £14.95.
 0710099916

John Mackie, who died in 1981, is most widely remembered for having defended two theses: first, that our ordinary ethical beliefs contain an error; second, that coming to realize this would have no effect upon them. The majority of essays in this volume – those contributed by Simon Blackburn, R. M. Hare, S. M. Hurley, John McDowell and Bernard Williams – are devoted to showing that one or the other of these theses is false. All but one of the remaining essays are contributions to ethical thought which are more or less independent of Mackie's work. Philippa Foot argues for "a morally relevant distinction between what we do and what we allow to happen". Amartya Sen argues for an ethical outlook based on human capabilities rather than on utility, welfare or rights; David Wiggins tries to inject life and precision into the notion of a need. Finally, an essay by Steven Lukes disputes another belief of Mackie's, namely that the aim of morality is to check man's natural egoism and selfishness. In short, the essays in this volume either disagree with Mackie's work or ignore it. But it is a tribute to Mackie that this book is a tribute to him. For Mackie was committed to good argument, and the quality of argument in this volume is high. Mackie's writing speaks a man who was willing to state his views clearly, indifferent to how wrongheaded they might appear, and to argue for them simply, without rhetoric or malice but as persuasively as he could. In this review I shall concentrate on the essays which dispute Mackie's two theses. The project of showing that both these theses are wrong can, as these essays suggest, help us to see how ethics might be able to give a plausible account of itself.

The mistake we make when we make ordinary ethical judgments, according to Mackie, is to assume that there are objective values. Since our ordinary judgments do not explicitly assume the existence of objective values, Mackie's claim must be that the only theory which could both explain and justify our ordinary ethical practices would be a theory which posited the existence of objective values. According to Mackie, any such theory would be false, because there are no objective values.

So far, almost nothing is clear: for the claim that values are or are not objective has no determinate content in abstraction from a theory of objectivity. "Objective" is a contrast-word which, with its partner "subjective", may be used to map out a variety of contrasts. In each contrast, that which is said to be "objective", will be assumed to be relatively more independent of human judgment, according to some notion of independence, than that which is called "subjective". The editor calls "the issue of whether our moral judgements are in some way objective" (my italics) "that most fundamental issue in moral philosophy", but this cannot be right. There are some ways in which the issue of the objectivity of ethical values is altogether non-fundamental. A more interesting question, I think, is whether there is any way in which the objectivity of value is a fundamental question in moral philosophy.

John Mackie was alive to the quality of ethical experience. When we see a person acting admirably, our experience has the quality of reaction to a nobility that is there in the person's action. We do not seem to be projecting a feeling onto an action which is itself devoid of evaluative significance. Again, when we feel morally obliged to act in a certain way, we experience that (alleged) obligation as presented to us: it seems external in a way that, say, the decision to pour milk in one's cup after pouring the tea, rather than before, does not. (I assume this latter decision has not itself taken on moral significance.) Thus there is some paradigm of a "subjective" judgment, in contrast to which ethical judgments seem "objective". But Mackie believed that the only theory which could save the appearance would be one which posited ethical values as being objective in a widely strong sense: namely, as existing in the physical world, completely

independently of human judgment. The paradigm of an objective property for Mackie is a primary quality, such as an object's shape, and anything which falls short of this level of mind-independence comes out as subjective. Though they all disagree with each other, Blackburn, Hare, McDowell and Williams all agree, contra Mackie, that our ordinary ethical judgments do not presuppose that values are objective in this sense.

In a characteristically sensitive essay, John McDowell asks why one could not account for the phenomenology of ethical experience on the model of perception of a secondary property, like colour. An object's being red must be understood to consist in part in its disposition to appear red to a normal human observer in normal circumstances. A secondary property must be conceived in terms of a characteristic ability to produce a certain response; thus in contrast to a primary property it may be thought of as subjective. On the other hand, an object's colour is independent of any particular perceptual episode, so there is a sense in which the colour is *there* in the object anyway, rightly perceived as external to the agent, and presented to him. In this sense, colour may be treated as objective. Of course, there are important disanalogies between our perception of colour and our experience of ethical value, as Blackburn, Williams and McDowell himself point out. But McDowell's suggestion is that thinking about the perception of secondary properties might help us to formulate the right blend of mind-dependence and independence both to capture the lived quality of ethical life and to validate it.

McDowell is in general committed to showing that there is an alternative to basing one's metaphysics on the world-view of seventeenth-century science. But there is one point where, I believe, he unwittingly adopts this world-view. He rightly distinguishes the fact that an object's being red must be understood in terms of its ability to produce a certain perceptual experience from the fact that the explanation of this ability will mention the micro-structure of the object. He then says, "A *virtus dormitiva* objection would tell against the idea that one might mount a satisfying explanation of an object's looking red on its being such as to look red. The weight of the explanation would fall through the disposition to its structural ground." What is a *virtus dormitiva* objection? McDowell suggests that there is a principled objection to any explanation of an object's producing a certain response in terms of its (unexplained) ability to produce that response. But the correct objection, I believe, is not one of principle.

The problem with the explanation of an object's looking red in terms of its being such as to look red is that the world is such that this ability is itself explicable in terms of microstructure and neurophysiology. We can, however, imagine a world in which physical objects had brute abilities: abilities that could not be accounted for in terms of material microstructure. (Aristotle's world is like that.) In such a world, there might be no further explanation of a powder's efficacy to induce sleep beyond the fact that the powder has a *virtus dormitiva*. The absurdity of Molière's doctor was not manifested merely by his *virtus dormitiva* explanation, but, first, by the fact that he hadn't noticed that he was living in a world where such an explanation will not do (and by that time in the history of science he should have) and, second, by the evident fact that he had done nothing to determine whether the powder did genuinely possess the *virtus*. (Aristotle, by contrast, would have devised tests to distinguish accidental onset of sleep from genuine inducement.)

This point is important because it is widely and, I think, mistakenly believed that if, any account has the structure of a *virtus dormitiva* explanation it must, for that reason alone, be inadequate. McDowell distinguishes "merely causal" explanations of value experience (those explanations which merely cite the cause of "the appropriate attitude") from "explanations of a different kind" (those which show that the situation genuinely merits the evaluative experience it has invoked). But instead of searching for a different kind of explanation, why doesn't McDowell say that there are certain types of causal explanation which also legitimate value experience? For example, the explanation of fear as caused by a genuinely fearful situation? The underlying reason seems to be that the explanation has a *virtus dormitiva* structure – a structure which it will retain just so long as it continues to legitimate the response it also explains. That is, one can say much more about what makes a situation genuinely fearful, but in the end one will be invoking the fearfulness of the situation to legitimate the fearful response. The correct position is not, as McDowell suggests, that because the explanation is both satisfying and has a *virtus dormitiva* structure it must be "an explanation of a different kind", but rather that for certain types of genuinely causal explanation – those which attempt to legitimate what they explain – the "*virtus dormitiva* objection" need not be an objection.

If there is a problem here, it is that in these modern approaches to ethics, what might broadly be called the metaphysical (the inquiry into the broad structure of reality) and the ethical (the inquiry into what we should do) have come apart. There need, contra Mackie, be no metaphysical objection to explaining the experience of admiration by citing the nobility of the person we admire, but there might well be an ethical one (perhaps nobility is the wrong sort of concept to employ in one's thought about the world, a holdover from the society of masters and slaves which Aristotle endorsed). It is, I think, a mistake to equate the metaphysical with the reflective or the "second order" and the ethical with the unreflective or the "first order". Some reflective inquiries may be both metaphysical and ethical: for example, Marx's, Nietzsche's, Freud's or even Aristotle's meditations on ethics. However, if Mackie (and Hume) are right there are certain

reflective inquiries into ethics which are metaphysical in that they have no bearing on how we should act. In his penetrating essay Bernard Williams challenges Mackie's claim that recognition of the error of our ordinary ethical beliefs would have no effect upon them. Though I am not confident, I think that Mackie may have been right, at least to the following extent: there might be some way of inquiring into the objectivity of ethics which would have no effect on our ethical beliefs. But is this type of inquiry we ought to be pursuing? It would of course be of interest to those who are by nature attracted to metaphysics, but it would be devoid of ethical significance. It seems to me that a less schizophrenic approach to ethics and metaphysics would be preferable.

The aspiration to understand one's ethical beliefs through and through is at once a physical and ethical. It is both a search for understanding – of self and world – and a practical commitment to change those beliefs and practices which depend for their lives on a deceptive presentation. The reason why a planation of admiration by appeal to nobility looks so anaemic is not, I believe, because a *virtus dormitiva* structure, but because it is being offered in abstraction from any substantive, critical inquiry into ethics. So absent is it is impossible to determine whether or not this is the type of *virtus dormitiva* explanation that gives *virtus dormitiva* explanations its name: namely, one which uncritically assumes the existence of nobility. In the context of genuine ethical inquiry, however, the explanation might look healthier; and the metaphysical which argued for the general acceptability of this type of explanation would appear more convincing than it now does.

Self-love and social

Richard Swinburne

TERENCE PENELHUM
 Butler
 221pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £18.95.
 0710205996

Joseph Butler wrote two major works – the *Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* and the *Analogy of Religion* – which won him a permanent place in the history of philosophy. The *Analogy*, first published in 1726, became a standard work of Christian apologetics for the next 150 years. It sought to show that, given our knowledge of the world, the Christian doctrine of a God who continually sustains the Universe, occasionally intervenes in his operation to reveal and mediate, encourages men to sanctify and will bring the dead to judgment, is more probable than the then fashionable "deist" view that in the beginning God made the world but thereafter left it and us to our own devices. With the end of the nineteenth century, philosophers and theologians lost interest in careful and rigorous apologetics; but that phase, too, is passing, and interest in Butler's philosophy of religion is reviving.

The *Sermons* (together with the short "Dissertation on Virtue") describe the structure of human desires, the inclinations to action with which we find ourselves. We have many particular desires which concern both ourselves and others: for a drink for ourselves and a drink for a thirsty child. As well as such particular desires, we have self-love, a general desire for our own long-term well-being, and benevolence, a general desire for the long-term well-being of others. At the top of the tree of human inclination stands conscience, with supreme authority.

In a well-ordered mind, Butler taught, the particular desires would be kept in order by self-love and benevolence, and these in turn would be kept in order by conscience. Sometimes, however, minds get out of joint. Sometimes our self-love is insufficient, and some particular desire (eg, for a rest) prevents us from doing what is for our long-term good. Sometimes, too, we do not follow the supreme guide, conscience – though if we had an adequate understanding of wherein consisted our true well-being, and also well-developed benevolence, conscience would seldom need to interfere. Conscience is a natural endowment, where-

by we detect right or wrong – we should regard it as an alien force imposed from without. The morality of actions which conscience detects is not always a matter of the sequences, or even the believed consequences of those actions. Truth-telling is, for Butler, obligatory – independent of its consequences. Butler's objectivist and deontological ethics balanced by his account of the *independent* value of benevolence and self-love, he appealed since 1726 to many careful and sensitive moral philosophers; and, unlike the *Analogy*, has become during this century a required reading for undergraduate students of philosophy. So, too, has the short "Dissertation on Personal Identity". Butler's deontology is something ultimate and irreducible to analysis in terms of bodily or mental continuity.

The major concern of Butler's writing was practical – to lead men to take seriously the claims of virtue and religion in a secular world. Like Wesley (with whom he had a famous altercation) in his aims, but so unlike Wesley in his methods, Butler played a major role in keeping Christianity afloat in England in the eighteenth century.

In this latest volume in the series *Arguments of the Philosophers*, Terence Penelhum has provided a sympathetic and detailed commentary on Butler's work. In general he considers himself to exposition of the *Sermons*, but he also submits the initially less appealing arguments of the *Analogy* to rigorous philosophical scrutiny. He argues that Butler's claim that the sufferings of this world may plausibly be regarded as preparation for the next, is not originally directed against eighteenth-century deism, still has force against modern atheism. And he shows that in urging that probability (rather than proof) is all we need in religion, Butler was none too clear, either about how much probability is needed, or about what is needed for – religious belief or religious practice – or about how far practice is possible without belief. Still, Professor Penelhum holds, as I do, that Butler was on the whole right. Religion matters enormously; it is our duty to give serious attention to assessing the probability of its truth and, having done so, to decide how to respond to its claims.

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Catching the pitchers

Zachary Leader

DONALD HALL
 Fathers Playing Catch with Sons: Essays on
 sport (mostly baseball)
 198pp. San Francisco: North Point; distributed
 in the UK by Scolar. Paperback, £12.50.
 085471681

Donald Hall is an American poet and sports fan, particularly of baseball. He goes to games, watches them on television and has written about them in the *TLS* and elsewhere. He also likes basketball and ping-pong. What he doesn't like is the violence of American football, about which he writes with some heat. Most of the essays collected here concern baseball, and belong to recognizable types. There is a Plimptonese piece on spring training; a lyrical effusion on Fenway Park in Boston; a profile of the eccentric Pirate pitcher, Dock Ellis; a purplish discourse, "Baseball and the Meaning of Life"; a couple of poems; and two short pieces of sports writing, one on verse, the other on prose. There are also two essays on basketball, one on ping-pong and the concluding piece on football. The essays are mostly relaxed and informal, mixing personal reminiscence with observation, anecdote and the occasional gemlike statistic.

The best bits, as often in such writing, take us behind the scenes. Baseball players chew tobacco as well as gum, and when the dugout is full, "the arcs of spit are miraculous to behold". Those who don't spit, lean far back in the slime-covered dugout (so they can't be seen) and smoke, "all during the game". Then there's batting practice, at which Hall observes an ambidextrous pitcher named Ramon Hernandez: "Ramon drops his glove, picks up a baseball in each hand, winds up both arms... and fires two baseballs simultaneously." Once, in a game against Cincinnati, Hernandez's team-mate, Dock Ellis, set out to hit every batter he faced. He hit the first batter in the side, the second in the kidneys and the third in the back. When the fourth came up, Ellis had to throw behind him to keep him near the plate. "There was no way I could hit him", he complains. "He was running."

Hall's leisurely account of the literature of baseball begins with Jane Austen and *Northanger Abbey* (1818): "It was not very

wonderful that Catherine should prefer cricket, baseball, riding on horseback...". According to the *OED*, this is the game's first appearance in print, but Hall and others have discovered an earlier reference in John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocketbook* (1744). What exactly "baseball" means in these contexts is unclear, though Hall presumes it must have been something like rounders ("Alas, baseball more or less is rounders"). Even in Walt Whitman's day, the pitcher, as in rounders, served up the ball underhanded, to make batting easier. When the overhand delivery and the curveball were introduced, Whitman was appalled. Was it true, he asked, that "the pitcher who pitches the ball, aims to pitch it in such a way that the batter cannot hit it?" "I should call it everything that is damnable."

Today the underarm pitch survives in softball, a game even literary critics can play. In the summer of 1950, for example, at Kenyon College in Ohio, a series of softball games was played between William Empson's team, the Ambiguities, and L. C. Knights and the Explorers. John Crowe Ransom, presumably "Commissioner" as well as Chairman of English, suggested to Empson that *Some Versions of Pastoral* include a section on games; something Hall would obviously approve, since he frequently likens baseball to pastoral, which he thinks of as "a universe where conflict never conceals itself, where the issues are clear and outcome uncertain".

"Proseball", the piece from which these anecdotes derive, has its hardball moments. John Updike gets it in the kidneys, though his 1960 essay on Ted Williams's last at-bat is said to have inaugurated "the high balleristic tradition" of baseball writing, the tradition of Roger Angell, author of "the best prose of all baseball writers of all time". Hall's own writing owes a debt to Angell, as well as to newspaper favourites such as Peter Gammons of the *Boston Globe* and the late Red Smith of the *New York Times*. It is Smith, most famous of American sports writers, who recalls Bugs Baer on the fireballing Lefty Grove, who "could throw a lamb chop past a wolf". This sort of thing, together with patches of sharp, clear observation, help to redeem Hall's more "poetical" moments, which can be sentimental and self-regarding. The good bits almost justify the book's price, though £12.50 is rather too much to pay for any slim (or even slimish) paperback.

AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Richard Aldrich's *Paintings from Books: Art and literature in Britain 1760-1900* has just been published.
 Hugh Brogan's *History of the United States of America* was published last year.
 Craig Brown is the London correspondent for *New York* magazine.
 David Coward was the winner of the 1985 Educational Television Association award for his film *Existentialism*, 1984.
 Stephen Fender is Professor of American Studies at the University of Sussex.
 Althea Hayter's books include an edition of De Quincey's *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, 1971.
 Nicholas von Hoffman is the author of *Organized Crimes*, 1985.
 Christopher Hoyle's *Englishmen: A poem* was published last year.
 Anthony Howard is Deputy Editor of the *Observer* and was its Washington correspondent from 1966 to 1969.
 Peter Jay is the author of *The Crisis for Western Political Economy*, 1984.
 Basil Kureishi's film *My Beautiful Laundrette* is on general release at the moment.
 Zachary Leader is Senior Lecturer in English at the Roehampton Institute of Higher Education.
 Jonathan Lear teaches philosophy at Yale University.
 Mario Vargas Llosa's novel *The War of the End of the World* was published in 1985.
 Colin Matthews helped Benjamin Britten with his last compositions from 1974 to 1976.
 Helen McNell teaches English and American Studies at the University of East Anglia.
 Philip Oakley's third volume of autobiography, *At the Jazz Band Ball*, was published in 1983.
 Connor Cruise O'Brien was Editor-in-Chief of the *Observer* from 1978 to 1981.
 S. S. Frawley's *Frankenstein's Island: England and the English in the writings of Heinrich Heine* will be published later this year.
 Frederick Raphael's most recent novel, *Heaven and Earth*, was published last year.
 Salman Rushdie's novels include *Midnight's Children*, 1981.
 Roger Scruton is the Editor of the *Salisbury Review*. His book *Sexual Desire* will be reviewed in the *TLS* next week.
 Paul Smith is Professor of Modern History at the University of Southampton.
 John Steane's books include *The Grand Tradition: Seventy years of singing on record*, 1974.
 John Sutherland's most recent book is *Offensive Literature*, 1982.
 Richard Swinburne is Professor of the Philosophy of Religion at Oxford. His *The Evolution of the Soul* will be published later this year.
 Hugh Trevor-Roper's *Renascence Essays* were published last year.
 David Trotter's study of twentieth-century American, English and Irish poetry, *The Making of the Reader*, appeared in 1983.
 Marina Warner's *Monuments and Maidens: The allegory of the female form* was published in 1985.
 Anthony Waugh is the new editor of the *Literary Review*. He was formerly a columnist on the national magazine *Private Eye* and is the author of several novels, among them *Consider the Lilies*, 1980.
 Anthony Zanker's novel, *Ride, Kick, Slitz*, 1985, has been broadcast in an English adaptation by BBC Radio 4.

Striking matches

Timothy d'Arch Smith

PRINCE RANJITSINHJI
 With Stoddart's Team in Australia
 288pp. Constable. £7.95.
 009466702
 R. C. ROBERTSON-GLASGOW
 46 Not Out
 206pp. Constable. £7.95.
 009466710
 MARCUS WILLIAMS (Editor)
 Double Century: 200 years of cricket in *The Times*
 621pp. Collins. £17.50.
 0002181320

Prince Ranjitsinhji's book was written – with a little help, Alan Ross suggests in his introduction to this reissue – in the wake of the disastrous tour in 1897–8 where, despite winning the first Test, England grievously lost the other four. In his technical analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides, "Ranji" reveals an expert tactical brain which, if A. E. Stoddart had taken the trouble to pick it on the field of play, might have saved such heavy defeats. Nothing ever changes: there were crowd problems then, disputed decisions and an unfortunate "chucking" episode by the opposition (E. Jones was the first bowler to be no-balled in a Test match for throwing). For this re-impression Alan Ross has supplied the averages, rather unhandily, on the endpapers ("Ranji" easily headed the batting with 1,124 runs at an average of 62.4); but full scores, at least for the international matches, and an index would not have come amiss.

R. C. Robertson-Glasgow's *46 Not Out* is another reprint, of a book first published in 1948. Cricket this time is only a connecting link in the autobiography of a witty, thoughtful and straightforward man. "Crusoe" – so nicknamed because Charlie McGahey of Essex had remarked, "I was bowled by an old — I thought was dead two thousand years ago, called Robinson Crusoe" – was good enough to play four years for Oxford, regularly for Somerset and once for the Gentlemen versus the Players. While adoring cricket (taken Christmas shopping in London as a child, he recalls he "bowed unchanged from Oxford Circus to Swan and Edgar"), he always refused to regard it as a religion of its competitors as immortals. In the 1930s he joined the *Morning Post*, at the same period that Neville Cardus was writing for the *Manchester Guardian* and C. B. Fry for the early edition of the *Evening Standard*, thus presenting cricket-lovers, as John Woodcock remarks in his introduction to *46 Not Out*, with a difficult choice of which newspaper to buy. (Woodcock modestly omits *The Times*, where he is at present cricket correspondent.)

These days its disloyalty to its two "home", of London, sides, Surrey and Middlesex, has turned decent readers away from *The Times's* cricketing columns, but *Double Century: 200 years of cricket in "The Times"* is a reminder of more agreeable years. Its editor, Marcus Williams, has made a splendid choice of reports, leaders, obituaries and news items, from June 1785 (disagreement between rival factions, cricketing and non-cricketing, concerning the correct recreational uses for White Conduit Fields) to January 1985 (England poised to beat India at Madras); it proves *The Times* to be one of the most important sources for historians of the game. Editorial policies have not always favoured reportage of the sport; G. E. Buckle, for instance, Editor in 1908, writing to the paper's manager, C. F. Moberly Bell, that it was "very clear that many of the best known ones, are people we should studiously keep clear of". Lord Northcliffe, too, had no love of the game. Baseball and soccer were his preferences. The paper's policy of anonymity might have militated against identification of the authors quoted, but meticulously maintained archives have yielded many – and prestigious – names of contributors over the years. It is pleasant to find "Crusoe" among them, hijacked or blanded from down the road. Sense, and sensibility, at Printing House Square, did not go overlooked.

INDEX OF BOOKS REVIEWED

Allen, Don. Finally Truffaut 200
 Bach, Steven. Final Cut 200
 Berger, Thomas. Nowhere 198
 Brown, Lucy. Victorian News and Newspapers 185
 Ducornet, Rikhi. Entering Fire 198
 Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and imaginative writing in America 181
 Fox, Paula. A Servant's Tale 199
 Habich, Robert D. Transcendentalism and the "Western Messenger" 182
 Hakutani, Yoshinobu. Selected Magazine Articles of Theodore Dreiser: Life and art in the American 1890s 181
 Hall, Donald. Fathers Playing Catch with Sons: Essays on sport (mostly baseball) 203
 Hetherington, Alastair. News, Newspapers and Television 189
 Hewat, Alan V. Lady's Time 199
 Higgins, George V. Impostors 183
 Honderich, Ted (Editor). Morality and Objectivity: A tribute to J. L. Mackie 202
 Howard, Patricia (Editor). Benjamin Britten: "The Turn of the Screw" 197
 Levy, David W. Herbert Croly of "The New Republic": The life and thought of an American progressive 182
 Liddell, Robert. Elizabeth and Ivy 201
 Moran, William R. Nellie Melba: A contemporary review 197
 Penelhum, Terence. Butler 202
 Peirce, Graham. Hollywood Destinies: European directors in America, 1922-1931 200
 Pohl, Frederick. Pohlstars 198
 Postman, Neil. Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public discourse in the age of show business 189
 Ranjitsinhji, Prince. With Stoddart's Team in Australia 203
 Rawson, Claude (Editor). The Yearbook of English Studies: Volume 16, 1986: Literary periodicals special number 184
 Robertson-Glasgow, R. C. 46 Not Out 203
 Ross, Alan. Blindfold Games 201
 Sahgal, Nayantara. Plans for Departure 198
 Shaw, Bernard. Agitations: Letters to the Press 1875-1950 180
 Thernerson, Stefan. The Mystery of the Sardine 199
 Williams, Marcus (Editor). Double Century: 200 Years of cricket in "The Times" 203
 Wilson, Charles. First with the News: The history of W. H. Smith 1792-1972 186
 Wilson, Christopher P. The Labor of Words: Literary professionalism in the progressive era 181
 Wormald, Jenny. Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of manhood, 1442-1603 195

The controversy contained in Richard Clogg's article in last week's *TLS*, "Academic freedom and the perils of sponsorship", is given a much more detailed analysis in his book *Politics and the Academy: Arnold Toynbee and the Koras Chain*, which will be published by Frank Cass in the spring.

INFORMATION, PLEASE

John Mackinnon. Robertson (1856-1933), freethinker, historian, politician: any material relevant to his life; for a biographical essay in a book.
 J. R. Herrick.
 88 Islington High Street, London, N1 8EW.
 David Jones (1895-1974), painter and poet: information, personal reminiscences, letters, location of art works; for a biography.
 Thomas Dilworth.
 Department of English, University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada N9B 3P4.

Benjamin Constant: any unpublished material relating to his visits to Britain 1783-5 and 1787; in connection with his book *Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël and Welmar*.
 David Spooner.
 96 Halbuth Road, Dunfermline, Fife.

Frederick Macdonald: author of *The Secret of Charlotte Brontë Followed by Some Reminiscences of the Real Monsieur and Madame Heger*, 1914; whereabouts of their copyright-holder, for permission to quote from letters in the Brotherton Collection, Leeds University; for a study of Macdonald's influence on Brontë scholarship.
 Keith C. Odum.
 Department of English, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas 76129, USA.